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LORD BRACKENBURY BY AMELIA B. EDWARDS

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. 2.

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VOL. II.

LORD BRACKENBURY

A NOVEL

BY

AMELIA B. EDWARDS,

AUTHOR OF

"BARBARA'S HISTORY," "DEBENHAM'S VOW,"

ETC. ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1880.

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LORD BRACKENBURY.

CHAPTER I.

THE HERR BARON SHOWS FRÄULEIN WINIFRED THE SIGHTS OF MUNICH.

GIVEN sincerity and straightforwardness on both sides, few things in life are easier, or pleasanter, than the making of new friendships. Happily, there is a freemasonry of simplicity as well as of roguery; and honest folk, like thieves, have an instinct of mutual recognition. It is when "things are not what they seem;" when there is pretence of any kind—pretence of wealth, or position, or cleverness, or devoutness—that honesty finds itself at fault. Then, instead of a free and cordial interchange of thought, there come polite platitudes, and constraint, and mutual weariness. But there was no pretence about the Kreutzmann family. They were good, simple souls; homely, kindly, frugal, honest as the day.

By the time Winifred Savage had spent twenty-four hours under their roof, she was as much at home as if she had lived there all her life. They began by making her, as it were, free of all that was theirs.

The pastor took her into his study that first morning, after breakfast; showed her his books, and invited her to borrow them when she pleased; a privilege of which she was not likely to take much advantage, seeing that they were mainly works of German theology and philosophy, with a sprinkling of Greek and Latin classics.

After this, Frau Kreutzmann conducted her over the house, displayed her stock of preserves and cheeses, unlocked her numerous presses, and with innocent pride exhibited her stores of linen, snowy-white and fragrant with lavender. Then the two girls—Kätchen and Brenda—carried her off to the garden, the orchard, and the paddock; showed her their hen-houses and bee-hives; and introduced her to the pony, the cow, and the poultry.

Her own room was just as Lancelot had described it—one of three at the end of a corridor, commanding a wide flat landscape, bounded by a range of very distant mountains. Christine occupied the adjoining chamber on the one side, while on the other was a large empty room, capable of being converted, as Lancelot had suggested, into a studio.

All this, it will be seen, was homely enough. So also were the ways of the family. They had prayers and breakfast at seven, dinner at one, supper at eight. In the morning, while her nieces did the lighter household work, Frau Kreutzmann went to market and prepared the mid-day meal. The pastor, meanwhile, worked in his garden in summer, went out with his gun in winter, visited the sick and the poor, and looked in at the parish school-house. After dinner, when his womenkind either sat at needlework or paid

visits in the town, it was his daily wont to repair to the Royal Library, and there (being one of the privileged few to whom those doors of learning are open after public hours) he would read till dusk, seated in his accustomed chair in his accustomed corner. In that chair, in that corner, the good man had spent his afternoons for the last twenty years, accumulating material for a learned theological work which some said would never be finished, and which others declared had never even been begun. Then in the evenings he read aloud to his family—generally some book of history or travels; and sometimes, though not often, he spent an hour at his club. Such was Winifred's new home; such the daily routine going on within its walls.

Having brought her thither, Lancelot was to go back immediately to England. That is to say, he would remain for a day or two, to see her settled, and to show her a few of the sights of Munich. The sights of Munich, however, are many, and can hardly be seen in a day or two, if one takes them seriously. There are churches old and new, paintings and sculptures, gardens, palaces, museums, and private studios without number. To talk of seeing all these in a day or two was a manifest miscalculation. That they should take a week was only to be expected. That they should even take a fortnight was not wonderful. It was not till a third week went by that the Kreutzmann family began to smile mysteriously, and to remark that it took the Herr Baron a long time to show Fräulein Winifred the lions of Munich.

"Well, well, we shall see," said Frau Kreutzmann;

"but take my word for it, before he leaves, we shall have a betrothal!"

"If they are not betrothed already!" suggested Brenda.

But Kätchen was confident that no such betrothal had as yet come to pass.

"Have you noticed how his eyes follow her when she is not looking? That is not the way that Karl Krebs looks at Marie Breitkopf. Accepted lovers are not afraid to show their love in their eyes."

"Such beautiful eyes as the Herr Baron has, too—and so expressive!" sighed Brenda; thinking, perhaps, how delightful it must be to have a lover. Above all, a lover so handsome, so noble, so everything that a lover should be!

But Frau Kreutzmann frowned, and shook her head reprovingly. No young maiden had any business to know that a gentleman's eyes were beautiful or expressive.

The "Herr Baron," meanwhile, had taken up his quarters at a hotel in the town; and although, in his character of cicerone, he came every morning to fetch Winifred for some excursion, he was careful not to intrude too frequently upon the privacy of her hosts. It was only when especially invited that he spent an evening at the parsonage. On these occasions the girls put on their prettiest caps, and Frau Kreutzmann made an apple-kücken for supper. After supper, they generally had music. That is to say, Kätchen and Brenda sang Bavarian national songs, accompanying themselves on the guitar and zitter; and sometimes, if a neighbour or two dropped in, they pushed aside the tables and chairs, and waltzed as only Germans can.

Thus the days went by, and to Winifred Savage it seemed that life was an enchanted dream. The place, the people, the galleries, the palaces, the spacious modern piazzas, the picturesque old by-streets—all were new, all were delightful. A whole world of art, and beauty, and history was suddenly revealed to her. Names that till now had been only names became wondrous realities. Gods and heroes and Cæsars, immortal in precious marbles of old time, held her with their awful beauty. Vandyck, Rembrandt, Albert Dürer, each in his habit as he lived, looked at her from the canvases their own hands had painted. Rubens dazzled her with profuse and gorgeous pageantry. Titian's Charles the Fifth turned upon her that inscrutable mask which the great Emperor desired should be handed down to posterity by no other pencil. The frescoes of Cornelius, Kaulbach, Liebertz, and their school, brought before her the great and good and wise of all the ages. Rottmann, in colours then fresh and glowing, showed her the fairest and most famous places of the earth—Rome, Athens, Corinth, Thermopylæ, the Plains of Troy, the Field of Marathon. Had she ever before realised that the past was once the present—that the dead once lived, and were as ourselves? Had she herself ever really lived till now?

Being, however, but a very imperfectly educated young lady, whose reading had been of the scantiest, and whose knowledge of art was chiefly derived from the Langtrey family portraits, was she not in some danger of receiving too many impressions at once, and of becoming hopelessly bewildered? It was much to Lancelot Brackenbury's credit as an Art-Mentor that

he foresaw this peril, and guarded against it by a judicious subdivision of his programme. He never introduced his neophyte to more than one school at a time—to-day the early German masters: to-morrow the Spaniards; yesterday, Rembrandt and the Dutchmen. The other morning was spent among Greek and Etruscan vases. Next week, they will take the Italian schools, and the sketches of the Old Masters. The Netherlands school has, of course, a day to itself; and the exhibition of modern pictures demands more than one visit. Then there are the collections of gems, medals, and engravings; to say nothing of the various halls of sculpture in the Glyptothek, the historical frescoes in the Festsaalbau, the Königsbau, &c., &c. As a system of educational sightseeing, there can be no question that Lancelot's curriculum was very nearly perfect; but then it took a long time to carry out. That was the worst—or, possibly, the best—of it.

Then, besides pictures and sculptures, there were private studios; and the name of the private studios was legion. To these they generally went in the afternoons; as then the artists were more at leisure. Winifred, meanwhile, held to her fancy that she should like to model. With this view, they went the round of most of the ateliers of sculpture in Munich; visiting, among others, the studio of a certain Herr Krüger, who was a sub-professor at the Academy of Arts, and lived not far from the Kreutzmanns, in a tumble-down farm-house on the left bank of the Isar. He was an old man who had missed success while others achieved it, and so remained unknown in the days when fame and fortune were to be had in Munich almost for the seeking. Schwanthaler, and the followers of Schwan-

thaler, had carried off the prizes and the glory; and Krüger, a dreamer and a recluse, had been left out in the cold. He was old, and he was poor, and he eked out his scanty salary by taking pupils. The pupils met twice a week in class, and were free to work in his studio daily. Winifred took a liking to the place at first sight, and to the melancholy little old man in his shabby blouse and old black velvet cap; and so it was arranged that she should join his class immediately after Christmas.

"You will find three other ladies here," he said. "You will not be alone. But you must work. Art is a service—not a pastime. Work hard; work well; and I will give you all I know. Have you drawn much from the round?"

"I have never drawn, except a little—very little—in pencil," said Winifred, timidly.

"Nor tried your hand at the clay?"

"Never."

He looked at her doubtfully.

"You have no idea of modelling, then?" he said.

"N—no—not exactly. I have tried a little—in wax."

"In wax!" he echoed. Then, changing his tone—"Ah, well," he said, "you can but make the attempt. Only remember—you must work."

As if she had come to Munich to be idle! As if work was not the one thing upon which her mind was set!

There was no danger of her not working—after Christmas.

CHAPTER II.

EROS SPEAKS AND PALLAS LISTENS.

While Lancelot and Winifred were studying the Fine Arts, winter came on apace. The first snow fell; the first thin ice frosted the surface of the ponds; and pastor Kreutzmann brought out his sleigh-bells to be rubbed up and brightened.

Lancelot, meanwhile, announced his intention of staying over Christmas Day. Fancy what it would be to spend Christmas at Old Court with the bats and owls! No—he preferred to remain in Munich, and help to decorate Frau Kreutzmann's Christmas Tree.

That Christmas Tree was a great event. It occupied the thoughts and fingers of the Kreutzmann family for many a month beforehand. There was a certain drawer in one of Frau Kreutzmann's numerous presses, quite full of pretty things knitted and netted, braided and embroidered, which she and her nieces had made. For on Christmas Eve there was to be a family party at the Parsonage; and every guest, old and young, little and big, would expect to find a present on the boughs of the young fir tree which was the hero of the evening. Then, besides this miscellaneous drawerful, they all had special gifts for each other; gifts prepared by stealth, which must on no account be seen till the evening of the "great event." So all had their secrets — innocent, loving secrets, which made them happy in the keeping, and happier still in the revealing.

And now Winifred must have her share in the mystery and add her quota to the tree; so when

Lancelot came one morning, a day or two before Christmas, to take her to the Glyptothek, she asked him to go first to the bazaar in the Odeon's Platz, that she might "do a little shopping."

Of course, she loved shopping—what woman does not? Perhaps she even enjoyed it more than most women; for it was a pleasure of which she had hitherto known little. Besides, there is much to buy in the bazaar in the Odeon's Platz—trinkets in stag-horn and ivory, toys in carved wood, pretty things in bronze and porcelain and Bavarian glass! Delighted as a child spending its first fairing, she chose a brooch for Kätchen, a locket for Brenda, a purse for Frau Kreutzmann, a spectacle-case for the pastor, an apron for Christine . . . . she would fain have bought everything in the bazaar! As for Lancelot, he could only look on indulgently and awkwardly, as men are wont to look on under such circumstances; reminding her every now and then that the Glyptothek closed at midday.

"I wonder what you are going to give me, Winifred?" he said, when this weighty matter was at length concluded.

"I might ask you the same question," she replied; "and I suppose I should get the same answer—nothing."

"Nay, I will not treat you so shabbily."

"Do you mean that you are going to give me a Christmas-box?"

"Undoubtedly."

Then, like a true daughter of Eve, she wanted to know what this Christmas-box would be; but he very properly declined to gratify her curiosity. So, between

coaxing and obduracy, they came to the doors of the Glyptothek, which in those days were guarded by a meek giant in blue and silver. That giant was an old man then, and must be dead ere now; but he was a veritable giant, eight feet high without his shoes, and had been a soldier in his youth. He smiled down upon the new comers benevolently. They had been there several times already; and he remembered the fair face of the lady and the florins which had found their way from the gentleman's purse to his own capacious palm. Having, on those former occasions, chiefly occupied themselves with the Roman and later Greek sculptures, they went no further to-day than the Hall of Æginetan marbles.

Here they found a party of English, consisting of two gentlemen and a lady—evidently passing travellers; for the men were each provided with a slung field-glass and a Murray's guide. The elder of these, who seemed to be the husband of the lady, was the critic and connoisseur of his party. He talked, and his companions listened.

"They are the most remarkable archaic sculptures extant," he was saying. "They link the beginnings of Greek Art with the period of Phidias. What you see here are the groups from the two pediments of the Temple. They were found under eight feet of soil. And see what care the soil has taken of them! They are in perfect preservation—the features as sharp, the curls as crisp, as if fresh from the hand of the sculptor! Then, as for finish—look at the extremities. Every nail, every finger-joint elaborated! Yet these figures were placed so high that all that delicate detail was out of sight. There's sincerity of treatment for you!"

"Hang me, though, if I can understand why the faces are all alike, and why they all wear the same smirk," said the younger man. "They are more like masks than faces."

"Ah, that is just it!" replied the connoisseur, eagerly. "They are, in a sense, masks. That is to say, they are the faces of heroes and demigods—creatures of ideal valour and serenity, who smile when they slay, and when they are slain."

The lady looked as if she thought her husband infallible. But his interlocutor stared incredulously.

"You think the woodenness of these faces is intentional?"

"I mean to say that the men who modelled these figures had passed beyond that point of archaism when 'woodenness,' as you call it, is unconscious. They had mastered truth of form and freedom of action; and I think they simply perpetuated the archaic type of face, because that type was sacred and traditional."

The younger man stroked his moustache contemplatively.

"Well, you know about these things, and I suppose you are right," he said; "but it bothers me to understand why they shouldn't have done better, if they knew how."

Lancelot smiled, and was for moving to the other side of the hall; but Winifred hung back. She wanted to hear the connoisseur's reply.

"But he is a stupid prig," said Lancelot. "He is only talking for effect."

However, she lingered; and the eloquent man, seeing that he had an audience, became more eloquent.

"Look at that Minerva," he said. "Because she is

a goddess, she is purposely made to look less human than the warriors. That precisely bears out my theory. And if you had a purely human warrior in the group, you may depend he would have a purely human face. What you take for 'woodenness' is calculated effect—the outcome of the highest artistic subtlety."

This was more than Lancelot could bear.

"Do come away!" he whispered.

"But he talks so beautifully!" said Winifred.

"He talks the sublimest rubbish."

Lancelot hated tall talk; especially tall talk of the æsthetic sort. Above all, it irritated him that Winifred should listen to this sort of thing with admiration.

"The fellow is a prig—and a pretentious prig," he said, as he drew her away to look at a model of the temple at the other side of the hall.

The man's pretentiousness would have amused him at any other time; but that Winifred should listen to him in that way was unendurable.

Presently this gentleman, with his wife and friend, passed out into another room.

"I wonder, now, why you are so hard upon that poor man?" said Winifred, looking after them. "He talks well."

"If you call that talking well!"

"And what he said was interesting—especially about that figure of the goddess."

"It is a puzzling statue, and it has exercised the wits of wiser critics than our declamatory friend," said Lancelot. And then he went on to explain how, notwithstanding that the whole group was undoubtedly executed at one time, the modelling of that figure was more archaic by half a century than the modelling of

its fellows. The feet, for instance, are turned sidewise; and in order to raise the goddess above the combatants, she is mounted on a little pedestal.

"Some regard that as a naïve device of early art," said Lancelot. "Others contend that the figure is meant to represent, not the goddess in person, but a statue of the goddess."

"And which are right?"

"Who shall say? I have my own notion about it—as our declamatory friend has his notion. And of course I fancy my own notion is the right one."

"What is your notion?"

"Well, I have been to Ægina; I have examined that temple; and I believe that, ancient as it is, it occupies the site of one still more ancient. It was once surrounded by a walled terrace, and the foundations of that wall are of prehistoric masonry. So, in my opinion, are the foundations of the platform on which the temple stands. Now my notion is that this statue is probably a copy of one much older, which may have stood in the cella (that is, the Holy of Holies) of the first temple. Hence its more archaic type. I cannot of course vouch for that first temple. It may never have existed, save in my imagination. But such is my idea."

Then he told her how, the island being volcanic, these groups were probably flung from their places by a shock of earthquake; and how they were found, broken and buried and overgrown by bushes, just where they had fallen, at each end of the building. And then he described the position of Ægina—how it lies facing the Attic coast, fair and solitary, in view of Athens and the Parthenon; mountain looking to

mountain, temple to temple, with the blue sea between and the clear Greek sky above.

"It is forty years since the soil was disturbed and these figures were unearthed," he said. "And now the tamarisks and myrtles have grown again; and storks make their nests in the angles of the cornice, and goats browse in the sanctuary of the goddess."

"It must be a beautiful place!" said the girl, wistfully.

"There is not a more beautiful spot in Greece—or in the world," he said, looking at her earnestly. "Would you like to see it? I will take you there—some day."

She heard the words; but without heeding all that they implied. She was picturing to herself the scene as he described it—the solitary ruin; the placid sea; the flowering myrtles.

"Some day!" she repeated, dreamily.

He bent nearer. His breath came warm upon her cheek.

"When, dearest?" he said, passionately. "When?"

. . . . . .

It was all over now—the suspense, the uncertainty, the silence. He loved her. He had loved her always—always—from the time when, a lad at college, he came home for his first long vacation, and was taken to call upon the ladies of The Grange. He loved her then with a boy's enthusiasm; he loved her now with a man's steadfastness. It had been his first wild dream; his one romance; the poem, the passion of his life. He never dreamed when first he saw her—nor, indeed, till long after—that she was intended for his brother. Cuthbert was of all men the most reticent;

and he, Lancelot, was so many years younger than Cuthbert, that it was scarcely to be supposed the elder brother would at that time have taken the boy into his confidence. Then, when at last the knowledge came to him, it was too late. He loved her; and his love had gone too deep for cure. Yet he did what he could. He struggled with his passion as with a terrible temptation. He strove to cast it out, as though it were a deadly sin. He fled from it, as from a scathing fire. But he struggled, and strove, and fled in vain. It possessed him; it pursued him; it mastered him. Go where he would, he could not get away from it. It had become a part of himself. Not to think of her —not to dream of her—not to long for the sound of her voice, was as impossible as to live without breathing. All he could do was to avoid her. To that sacrifice, at least, he was equal.

This was why he lived his years of Art-studentship in Paris. This was why he so rarely came home. This was why he isolated himself at Old Court. Used she to wonder why he lived so much away from father, and brother, and home? Did she lay it to his devotion to his Art? Ah! she never guessed that it was because he loved her. He kept his secret well, in those days! That he kept it so well—that he could look his brother in the face, and hear him talk of the future, and never betray himself by look or word—that was his one great contentment. He would have shot himself rather than betray that secret. Better all the anguish of silence, better all the bitterness of absence!

And then, when Cuthbert was lost to them—when that great and terrible sorrow befel—still, and more than ever, he buried his secret in the depths of his

heart. For he would not, he could not, believe that his brother might never come back. And were not Cuthbert's rights, and Cuthbert's happiness, and Cuthbert's honour, dearer to him than even his own?

Then, as the years went by and brought no tidings —then there dawned upon him, little by little, the prospect of a possible future. As hope faded on the one horizon, it rose upon the other. Still he waited; still he doubted; still he held his peace. At last—at last . . . . . Well, she knew the rest! She knew how reluctantly he had taken his brother's name and place. But, having taken them, he seemed by that one step to have overleaped the barrier that separated their lives. From that moment, all was changed. From that moment, he put away the renunciation of years, making up his mind to remain silent only until he should have taken the oaths and succeeded to his inheritance. But to this last resolve he had not acted up. His love had been stronger than his will.

All this, hurriedly, eagerly, with the vehemence of long-suppressed passion, Lancelot Brackenbury poured out; not so much pleading his cause, as accounting for the time that was past.

"And I never betrayed myself!" he said, holding her hands fast in both his own. "My love! my darling! —in all those many years, I never betrayed myself— you never knew it!"

She was looking down; listening, and trembling a little; and very pale.

"No," she said softly. "You never betrayed yourself; but—but I think I always knew it."

"And always loved me? Ah, my sweet, say that you always loved me!"

A faint flush crossed the pallor of her cheek. She looked up. Her eyes met his as innocently as the eyes of a questioned child.

"Yes," she answered, gravely and simply. "I always loved you."

He stooped and kissed her on the lips that no man —not even his brother—had ever kissed before.

Then they talked, as lovers are wont to talk in the first hurried moments of their joy; and time passed; and the hour of closing came. The eloquent Englishman and his party, having worked round from hall to hall, emerged by way of the modern sculptures, and went out talking of Thorwaldsen's Adonis and Spalla's bust of Napoleon the First. The art-students who were drawing in the Hall of Apollo, put away their crayons and packed up their boards and easels. The giant counted his groschen, looked at the clock, and wondered what had become of the lady in black and the gentleman who always gave him a florin. At last, when the minute and hour hands stood within a hair's breadth of meeting, he took up his wand, and, before barring the doors, went round to clear the rooms. And there he found Lancelot and Winifred still, as he in his simplicity believed,. absorbed in contemplation of the Ægina marbles.

They had forgotten all about closing time. They had forgotten the meek giant, and the fighting warriors with their vacant faces, and the archaic Pallas on her pedestal. What cared they now for Greek or Trojan? What to them was the slaying of Patroclus? They thought of nothing, remembered nothing, but the present rapture. The past, with its glory, its poetry, its art, was for the moment as though it had never been.

They went out, like children, hand in hand; and the goddess seemed to look after them with her stony smile—that self-same smile with which, in the foregone time, she had so often looked down upon lovers lingering within the precincts of her temple. How many a furtive meeting had she not witnessed when the doors of the sanctuary were closed, and the priests were gone, and the evening star had risen! What vows of constancy had she not overheard—what prayers—what promises! And where are they now, those youths that wooed, those maidens that listened?

They lived, they loved, they died, they are forgotten:—that is what her cold smile seemed to say. Life is a flower that withers; Love is a breath that fails. But the sculptured stone, the chanted ode, the deathless deed, live on, and are immortal.

CHAPTER III.

THE OSTERIA DEL CAPPELLO.

THE writer who essays to weave into a single narrative the facts by which the destinies of many persons have been governed, must occasionally shift his scenes, and move the hands of his clock. Well is it for him that he is bound neither to observe the unities, nor to state his facts in chronological sequence. The utmost he need hope to do is to "pigeon-hole" those facts in his mind; to disentangle, to coordinate, to distribute them, and to present them to his readers as cursively and pleasantly as he can. He must be careful not to make too heavy demands on the patience of his fellow-

travellers. Above all, let him beware of what may be called a saltatory style of narrative; for it is disagreeable even in a story to be perpetually hurried from place to place, or to be always going backwards and forwards.

Still, these scene-shiftings are occasionally inevitable. Events must be related as they happened, and "set" in the localities where they happened; and if it should sometimes seem that incidents and personages not "germane to the matter," make unwarrantable intrusion upon a stage already occupied, it must be remembered that life is made up of such intrusions. Two ships, starting from opposite quarters of the globe, have been known to meet in a foggy night precisely under the line of the equator, escaping collision by almost a miracle. Two rivers, widely remote in their sources, converge as of set purpose, and meet to change the destinies of nations. Others, like the Tigris and Euphrates, make for a common goal, run parallel for awhile, and having sought each other in vain, diverge for ever. Men run against each other, wreck each other, miss each other, just like the ships and the rivers. The comparison is trite enough; but "'twill serve."

And the purpose it especially serves in this connection is to announce one of these same inevitable shiftings of time and place. We are bound for fresh woods and pastures new.

The scene changes to Verona.

To Verona in the month of October, some three weeks, or thereabouts, before the date of Mr. Marrables' visit to Old Court. To Verona, and more particularly to an ancient house in a narrow and infinitely dirty

by-street running almost in a line with the Piazza delle Erbe—a street of dingy shops and narrow pavements, of foul gutters, and gloomy archways full of hay-waggons and workshops; a street noisy with much hammering of coppersmiths and coopers, and pervaded by wandering odours of fried fish, leather, garlic, and stale cabbage water. Yet, like many another mean and uninviting thoroughfare in many another old Italian city, the Via Cappello has seen better days. Because it is gloomy and narrow, it is not necessarily mean. These high, dull houses were anciently the town residences of nobles whose feudal strongholds crowned the spurs of the blue hills for miles around. They built their streets narrow for shade and coolness; and they packed their houses closely, because space within the city walls was precious. The meanness of the street is in its modern uses, its dirt, its dilapidation. The houses themselves are of noble type, with rustic basements, and overhanging eaves, and here and there an ogive window, trefoiled and pilastered, or a fragment of rusty wrought-iron grating, broken, but still beautiful.

One of these houses—not by any means the most picturesque, though one of the largest, in the street—has long been known as the Osteria del Cappello.

A century ago, perhaps, the whole house may have been a flourishing hostelry; but as its prosperity declined, the three inner sides enclosing the courtyard became gradually sub-let, till the inn consisted (and still consists) of only the lower portion of the street-front. Here, on one side of the gateway, was the kitchen, and on the other a cheap trattoria, or dining-room, frequented chiefly by vetturini and peasant-

farmers. The two floors next above were in part appropriated to the accommodation of customers of the same degree, and in part occupied by the landlord and his family; the top-story, like all the rest of the building, being sub-let to families of the artisan class.

Seen from the street, it is a grim, desolate, prison-like place; with one lovely Gothic window boarded up, and a bundle of hay hanging over the dark archway. Seen from within on a bright morning, when two sides of the quadrangle are flooded with sunshine, and the gossips are out upon their balconies, and the vetturini are cleaning their carriages in the yard, and the cocks and hens are strutting about in search of what they may find, and all is noise, and life, and chatter, and bustle, it is as lively as a hive full of bees.

Three tiers of open galleries supported on pillars run round the three inner sides of the building, and are divided off according to the number of windows pertaining to the occupants of the rooms which open upon them. On the middle pillar of the lowest gallery, just opposite the porte cochère, hangs a little wooden pent-house containing a half-obliterated painting of the Virgin and Child; while over the archway, on the inner side looking to the courtyard, may be seen a sculptured tablet, on which is represented a shield with armorial bearings, surmounted, not by a knightly helmet, but by a quaint, low-crowned hat. It is this hat, this "cappello," which gives its name to both street and inn.

To say of one of these old palazzi that it is a house with a history, is a mere truism. The times in which they were built were times of feud and bloodshed, and the difficulty would be to find one whose

walls, if they could speak, would have no tale to tell. But the history attaching to this particular house is no mere record of murder and rapine. It perpetuates, almost as a matter of course, the memory of a deadly feud; but it also perpetuates the sweetest, the tenderest, the saddest love-story of the Middle Ages.

This Osteria del Cappello—otherwise the Hostelry of the Hat—was once a princely mansion; that Hat was anciently the crest of a noble Veronese family. The house was called the Casa de' Cappelletti; and the Cappelletti were the Capulets of Shakespeare.

Here Juliet lived; and hither, in mask and domino, came Romeo to his hereditary foeman's "accustomed feast." The baked meats about which old Capulet was so anxious, were cooked, maybe, in that very kitchen beside the archway; and the hall in which the guests danced and made merry would surely have been one of these ground-floor rooms looking into the courtyard—Basilio the joiner's workshop, perhaps, which has a rare old ceiling; or the long room opposite, which is now divided by a partition, and occupied by two sets of lodgers.

A hive, indeed! The old roof shelters some forty or fifty souls; decent, hard-working mechanics with their wives and families—shoemakers, tailors, silk-weavers, journeymen bakers, stonemasons, cork-cutters, leather-dressers, printers, and the like. The men, for the most part, go out daily to their work. The women live half their time in their balconies, gossipping, nursing their babies, darning their husbands' stockings, and cutting up vegetables for the midday "minestra." As for the children, whose name is legion, they swarm all over the place, chasing each other about the stair-

cases, playing at hide-and-seek among the hackney carriages in the courtyard, getting behind the horses' heels in the stable, tumbling down the cellar-steps, and behaving generally as if they were made of gutta-percha, and warranted not to break.

It is early—not quite half-past six,—and the vetturini are busy washing down their carriage wheels, dusting cushions and mats, attending to their horses, and so often going to the well with their buckets that the good housewives have hard work to get their pitchers filled.

"Dio! it is always the same game here," says a buxom, brown-skinned woman, the wife of a street porter who lives on the fourth story; "all the world wanting water at the one moment!"

"I have been waiting with my can these ten minutes by the clock!" grumbles another.

"Eh, that's nothing new!" chimes in a third—a wiry, acid-looking body, with a black kerchief tied about her head. "One had need to come before sun-rise, if one wouldn't lose half the morning."

Then, turning sharply upon the vetturini:—

"Ecco!" she says, "why don't you men carry your buckets to the fountain at the street-corner, instead of keeping us poor women waiting our turn at the crank, like a string of theatre folk at the gallery door? It isn't amusing, I can tell you!"

"Trudge off to the street-fountain yourself, Dame Giannetta," retorts one of the men. "*You* haven't to be at the station by seven, to meet the first train from Milan."

"I wouldn't leave cleaning my carriage till the last

minute, and then drive my poor horse off his legs, if I had!" retorts Dame Giannetta.

"Che, che, che, Paolo; where's the good of answering the women?" growls a stout fellow in a green felt hat, who is in the act of filling his own bucket. "They are magpies, and must chatter!"

"Ay; and they'd gossip their time away all the same, whether we kept 'em waiting, or whether we didn't," adds Paolo, with a shrug.

Whereupon, to the accompaniment of a shrill chorus of reprisals, the women push their way to the front; take the well by storm; and, half scolding, half laughing, keep possession of the crank till their household vessels brim over.

Meanwhile, first one, then another driver, buckles his last strap, fetches his whip from the stable, leads his horse and carriage out of the yard, and drives away. At last but one remains—a sturdy, fresh-coloured, sulky-looking young fellow with frizzy black hair, and a carnation stuck behind his ear. A fellow who sports a velvet collar to his coat and a crimson woollen sash about his waist, and thinks no little of his personal appearance. He is apparently in less haste than his companions; for he stays rubbing up the plated door-handles of his vettura and polishing his window-glasses, as if time at this hour of the morning were of no value.

"Look at 'Tonio Moretti, hanging about, as usual, that he may catch a glimpse of La Giulietta!" laughs one gossip to another.

"Lucky for her! There isn't a steadier lad in the whole quarter."

"Nor a better-looking!"

"So well-to-do, too!—his own vettura and his own two hacks; and he not twenty-three!"

"They'll make a pretty pair," quavers a meek old woman with skinny hands, bare arms, and naked feet in gaudy wooden clogs.

"I don't know so much about that," snarls Dame Giannetta, who has daughters of her own. "It takes two to make a pair, as any cobbler will tell you. 'Tonio's well enough—too short and thickset, to my thinking; yet well enough, as young men go now-a-days. But the Blessed Virgin only knows what he, or any one else, sees in La Giulietta!"

And then they fall to work to pick the said Giulietta to pieces. She is too tall; she is too thin; her nose is too short; she does her hair badly; she is unsociable; she has no manners; she wants education (your disparaging critic of the lower Italian class always comes down with this crushing allegation); and so on, in a gathering crescendo, which presently becomes so shrill that it attracts the attention of the young vetturino at the other end of the yard.

"Peace, wasp-tongues! Can't you let the donzella alone? Sacramento! You're never happy but when you're backbiting your betters."

These words—roughly spoken and emphasized with a scowl—break up the magpie Parliament with sudden confusion.

"Wasp-tongues, indeed! There's insolence for you!"

"Our betters? By my faith, I'd like to see them in this house!"

"Speak for yourself, 'Tonio Moretti! Maybe your betters are not our betters."

"Such a girl as La Giulietta, for example!"

"Brought up, as you may say, on charity!"

"Holy St. Nicholas! what next, I wonder?"

Thus muttering, scolding, frowning, the gossips catch up their pitchers and prepare to go their ways, just as a young girl carrying a big brass can runs lightly down an outer stair on the sunny side of the courtyard, and comes smiling into the midst of them.

"A happy day to you, Monna Teresa—and to you, Lucia. I hope the madre's cough is better this morning? Ah, Dame Giannetta, what a beautiful fuchsia you have in your balcony!—it does one's eyes good to look at it. Are Lisa and Lotta gone to market yet? Cara Carolina, I went to your door last evening when you were out—the poor dear baby was crying so piteously! But I could not get in to comfort him. Another time, if you will leave your key with me, I can attend to the little one. I never go out, you know, after vespers. What, going already? Cielo! what a hurry everyone is in this morning!"

A girl with big serious brown eyes; and a rosy, child-like mouth; and a slender throat; and a soft olive complexion, like pale gold—a girl as light and swift of foot as Atalanta herself; her little hands tanned, but not coarsened, by the ardent Lombard sun; and her black hair coiled in a loose, careless mass at the back of her delicate head. She looks very young—younger, indeed, than she really is; for she was seventeen only a week or two ago. She is an orphan, adopted and brought up by her uncle, one Stefano Beni; and Stefano Beni, who was her mother's brother, rents three little rooms and a balcony on the south side of the courtyard of the Osteria del Cappello. He is a hard-working, cross-grained old bachelor, by trade a wheelwright;

and his workshop is under one of the ground-floor arches of the Roman amphitheatre in the Piazza Brà. He says he is poor; the neighbours say he is parsimonious. Uncle and niece, at all events, live sparingly enough; and La Giulietta, who cooks, mends, washes, goes to market, and works at ecclesiastical embroidery for the trade, thinks herself well off with a new gown once a year.

"Why are they all in such haste to be gone?" she asks, wonderingly. "They hardly spoke . . . . is anything the matter?"

"Per Bacco!—it means that I have affronted them all round. They'd been dawdling about the well, cackling their ill-natured gossip for the last half hour; and I lost patience."

"What did you do?"

"It isn't what I did, but what I said."

"Then what did you say?"

"I called them 'wasp-tongues'!"

"A hard word, 'Tonio!"

"It was a true word; and they didn't like it. People never do like the truth."

"Does not that depend on how it is said, and by whom it is spoken? Now a hard word from you, 'Tonio, who are such a favorite . . . ."

The vetturino laughs, takes her can from her hand, and stands it on the brink of the well.

"What do I care for their liking or disliking? In all Verona, there is but one whose good-will I covet."

"That is ungrateful."

"Tell me that I am a favourite with yourself, and see if I will be ungrateful, bella Giulietta!"

But the girl is evidently in no mood to be courted.

"Do not quite fill the can, please," she says, brusquely; "or it will be too heavy."

"I will carry it up for you."

"And leave your horse to go where he pleases? See, he is tired of waiting. He knows he ought to be at work by now!"

"I wonder if he also knows by whose fault he is late?"

"The can is quite full enough, 'Tonio."

"We should have been at the station in time to meet the first train, if La Giulietta had come to the well at half-past six, instead of at a quarter to seven."

"Prythee give me the can, good 'Tonio! I am in haste to go to market—and hark! the clocks are striking."

"Nay, I must dry the handle first! Sure this is a bigger can than you bring most days? It looks as if it came from Venice."

"Uncle Stefano brought it from Chioggia, years and years ago—I daresay it came from Venice. I am sorry to be obliged to use it; but the other leaks, and I have given it to old Beppo to solder. But in truth I have no time to waste in talk—please give me the can."

"It is too heavy for you, cara! I must indeed carry it for you to the third landing."

This insistance, this "cara," are too much. Her eyes kindle with quick anger; and she gives him one look—just one.

"When I want help," she says, haughtily, "I will ask for it. And it will not be you whom I shall ask!"

"So, so! You need not wither a fellow up with

your lightning in that fashion!" remonstrates the vetturino, sulkily setting down the can. "You know I mean you well . . . . but do what I will, I never can please you, bella Giulietta!"

However, the wrath of La Giulietta is not to be turned aside by a soft word. She only tilts the can; pours off enough water to lighten it; and without another word, crosses the yard, mounts the stair, and is gone.

A heavy frown settles meanwhile on 'Tonio's handsome face. For a moment, he stands irresolute. Then, with a defiant laugh and a muttered oath, he lights a cigarette, leads his horse out into the street, flourishes his whip, and drives away.

"You are late this morning, dear," says old Anita, the chestnut-seller, when La Giulietta comes tripping presently through the archway on her way to market.

Old Anita has sat in the shelter of that ancient gateway, selling fruit in summer and chestnuts in their season, for the last thirty years. She is very old, and very poor; and the lodgers are good to her according to their means. So, when the girl stays to drop a centesimo into her little tray, she smiles and nods, and accepts the tiny obolus as a matter of course.

"You are late, dear," she repeats. "Ah! I saw how it was! I saw 'Tonio Moretti filling somebody's can just now at the well! Che! Che! Che!—the old woman has eyes as well as another. One need not be a Gitana to foretell the future, either!"

But La Giulietta is half way along the street by this time; and old Anita, looking after the slight figure threading its way rapidly among carts and foot-passengers, shakes her head, and sighs, and warms her

withered hands over the brazier on which her chestnuts are roasting.

"A good child! a dear child!" she mutters to herself. "Too good for him—too good! He will not make her happy."

CHAPTER IV.

A GOOD MORNING'S WORK.

Was it as quaint and beautiful a spot, I wonder, in the days of the Montecchi and Cappelletti, this market-place of palaces—this Piazza delle Erbe—of old Verona? Was it crowded then, as now, with picturesque stalls glowing with fruit? Was it dotted all over with huge white cotton umbrellas, like gigantic mushrooms? Did the lady Juliet coax her nurse to go round this way o' mornings as they returned from matins; and did Peter, walking behind with his young mistress's breviary and Madam nurse's fan, follow them home with his arms full of roses and lilies fresh with the dews of who knows how many centuries ago?

How pleasant it would be to think that the place is yet unchanged—that these palace-fronts, this quaint clock-tower, this Gothic market-cross and sculptured fountain, were seen, just as we see them, by the immortal lovers of the old, old story! That is what the good folk of Verona—the unlettered majority—believe implicitly. It matters not which ruler built this or that monument; or even which came first in order of time, Diocletian or Can Grande, Roman or Scaliger. To say of a place that it is old—very old—as old as

the days of the Montecchi and Cappelletti, is chronology enough for them.

Bred in the simple folk-lore of her class, Giulietta Beni not only believed all the popular traditions of her native city, but, half unconsciously, heightened and elaborated them out of her own dreams and fancies. She had read the story of Romeo and Juliet a hundred times over, in an old, dog-eared, dilapidated, vellum-bound volume which she found years ago at the bottom of a box that had been her mother's before her marriage. She had seen it as a "Drama-Tragico" in the Roman Amphitheatre, performed by a strolling company, with no other scenery and effects than the marble seats and the blue sky and the shifting sunlight. Once—and that was the greatest event of her life— she had heard Rossini's "Montecchi e Capuleti" from the gallery of the Teatro della Valle. And the play, and the story, and the opera, and the tradition, and the ancient streets and squares and churches of Verona, were all fused together in her mind, and belonged indissolubly to each other. She thought she knew the very spot, over against the Roman gateway, where Tybalt was slain. Of Juliet's window in the old house of the Via Capello, she was as confident as of her own; and she was quite sure that a certain little rock-cut chapel belonging once upon a time to the ruined monastery at the back of the Church of Saints Nazzaro and Celso, was no other than Friar Laurence's cell. As for this same Piazza delle Erbe, what could be more certain than that Romeo, counting the leaden-footed hours that kept him from his lady's balcony, was wont to pace these very pavements, and watch the hands of that very clock in yonder ancient tower?

When old Scalchi, who kept the bookstall at the corner of the Piazza dei Signori, told her one day that the clock-tower was built by Can Grande della Scala more than half a century after the date at which Romeo and Juliet are said to have lived and died, she was as indignant as if a sceptic had ventured to doubt the miraculous properties of the water in King Pepin's urn, or the piscatorial prowess of San Zenone. For of the line dividing tradition from fiction, she knew nothing. To her, it was all true; all historical; as much a part of Verona as the amphitheatre itself.

The market-folk had nothing but kind words and smiles for the girl, as she threaded her way in and out the maze of stalls. Everyone knew that she was Stefano Beni's orphan niece, that she lived at the Osteria del Cappello, and that her name was Giulietta. She had been her uncle's little housekeeper ever since she was nine years of age; and had come to market as regularly, and made her little purchases as prudently, as the oldest matron there.

"Good morning, La Giulietta!" says one, "Do you want a bit of real good stracchino cheese for the uncle's supper? I know he loves the Milan stracchino; and I kept a bit back on purpose, though Count Giovi's cook would fain have bought it all."

"Here, Giulietta mia!" cries another. "Did you ever see such sweet fennel as this? I brought it this morning from San Michele. You shall have it for two centesimi the bundle, though I sell it to everyone else for three."

"What vegetables do you want for the minestra, little one?" asks a third. "Fresh beans, potatoes,

cucumbers, onions . . . . . No one treats you better than I do, remember!"

But La Giulietta is in no haste to buy till she has been round the market; and so, in russet gown and dark blue kerchief, bareheaded, neatly shod, her only ornament a silver pin transfixing the dark coils of her shining hair, she goes to and fro amid alleys of scarlet tomatoes, purple mulberries, grapes, lemons, oranges, quinces, pumpkins, melons; gourds of all shapes, sizes, and colours, green, and pinky, and yellow, and violet; pearly rice from the rice fields about Mantua; and unground maize, like beads of clouded amber. Flowers are in profusion—roses, camellias, and autumn violets; besides mountains of mulberry leaves for silk-worm-breeders; pinecones for firing; flat baskets piled high with wrinkled olives; and sacks of shining brown chestnuts.

And here, bargaining, gossipping, laughing, chattering, are all the housewifely world of Verona, leavened by a sprinkling of Austrian soldiers in white uniforms, with here and there a mendicant monk in woollen frock and sandals.

Giving smile for smile, greeting for greeting, La Giulietta meanwhile makes her modest purchases; lettuce and cress and sweet fennel for salad; lentils and a handful of tawny fungi for soup; a little pat of fresh butter wrapped in mulberry leaves; and the proffered morsel of stracchino for Uncle Stefano's supper. These, with a dish of polenta, and perhaps a neat's foot, will furnish her larder for two or three days. And still, whichever way she turns, she meets some well-known face. Here are Dame Giannetta's daughters, Lotta and Lisa, beside themselves with joy; for Tomaso, the

carpenter's assistant at the Teatro Nuovo, has just given them three gallery tickets for to-morrow evening's performance.

"Dear little Giulietta!" they say, with a patronising air, "it is a pity we cannot take you also—you go out so seldom, and have so little pleasure! But, you see, the third ticket is for the mother; and she will not let us go anywhere without her—as if we were babies, and could not take care of each other! Ah! well, another time, perhaps, little Giulietta."

"Cara Giulietta, it was so good of you to bring my Tito that mug of soup last night," says the widow Margherita, another neighbour, who supports herself and her blind boy by straw plaiting. "He hardly coughed at all after it, and has been better ever since."

"Ah, la piccola!" laughs a bonny-looking, well-dressed dame, followed by a man who carries her purchases. "What is this pretty song that a little bird has been singing in my ear? Did he tell me that our Giuletta has found a Romeo?"

"Your little bird sings false, Signora Donda!"

"Nay, you look as if one accused you of sacrilege! But a lover—why, that's as it should be, my child, when one is young and pretty!"

But the girl turns away briskly; and the Signora Donda, whose husband keeps a café-billiard in the Via Leonana, shrugs her shoulders and laughs contemptuously.

"Che! che! che! one would think 'Tonio Moretti was not good enough for her!"

"In truth, she might go farther and fare worse, Signora Donda," replies the fat cook from the Hotel Colombo d'Oro, who is buying at the same stall.

"Eh, what would you have? The girls' heads now-a-days are as full of nonsense as a melon is full of pips. I'll be bound the foolish wench thinks a real gentleman would not be too good for her!"

But these criticisms are lost upon Giulietta Beni, who is by this time far enough away, attracted by a certain bookstall at the corner of the Piazza dei Signori. It is a bookstall of the humbler sort, stocked with broadsheet ballads, story-books in gaudy paper wrappers, second-hand missals, old music, cookery-books, lives of the saints, and the like; and it is kept by a one-eyed cripple popularly known, because of his peculiar voice, as Il Grillo (the cricket); but whose real name is Scalchi. There are several loiterers at Il Grillo's stall this morning, and his one eye has enough to do.

"Good morning to you, mia bella!" he cries, in his shrill falsetto. "I have something very special for you! I could have sold it a dozen times over, but I kept it for you. See—a new ballad, all about yourself! Ay, look here!—it is called '*The Fatal Loves of Romeo and Giulietta*'—a ballad in twenty-four verses, with a beautiful wood-cut to boot! La Giulietta (that's you, my dear, and very like you)—La Giulietta on the balcony, gazing up at the moon; Romeo behind the cypresses in the garden! Come, now, you will not grudge five centesimi for your own history and your own portrait, to say nothing of the lover in the garden! Why, the picture alone is worth the money! Two centesimi? Impossible. Why, I gave three for it myself! Fie! what a little Jewess it is! Well, there!—because you are a good child, and call me always by my right name, you shall have the ballad for what it cost me—three centesimi, as I'm a sinner!"

The girl blushes and bargains; the bystanders listen and laugh. One—a seafaring man apparently—who is turning over a book at the farther end of the stall, stays with his finger on the leaf, and looks at her with undisguised admiration.

"'Tis to be sung to the tune of '*Ti Voglio Bene Assai!*'" squeaks Il Grillo, pocketing his three centesimi, as La Giulietta runs away with her purchase.

"Why did you say that it was a song about herself?" asks the sailor, his finger still between the leaves.

"Eh! eh! That question shows you to be a stranger!"

"Well, yes—I am a stranger. Who is the donzella?"

"Her name is Giulietta."

"I guessed as much. And her surname?"

The stall-keeper shakes his head suspiciously.

"What is that to you?"

"Maybe nothing—maybe something ... Who knows? How much do you ask for this book?"

"Five Austrian lire."

"You said three just now."

"If I said three, I meant five," replies Il Grillo, with a cool stare.

The sailor smiled, chinking the loose coins in his trowsers' pocket.

"And the donzella? Where does she live? What is her father's name?"

"Prythee, let me look again at the book, Signore. Eh! eh! eh! See, now, what a head is mine! There's my private mark; and that mark stands for seven lire. Seven lire, Signore! You can take it or leave it—not a farthing less!"

Still smiling, the sailor brings out a sun-browned

hand full of money—silver and copper, with a gleam or two of gold. From these he selects a French ten-franc piece.

"You can give me three lire in change?"

Il Grillo's one eye sparkles covetously.

"Stefano Beni is a wheelwright. You will find his workshop under one of the archways of the Arena in the Piazza Brà," he replies, clutching the ten-franc piece.

"La Giulietta is his daughter?"

"His niece."

"But they don't live at the workshop under the archway—that is impossible."

Il Grillo has brought from the innermost recesses of his nether garments a little greasy bag tied with leather strings, wherein he deposits the half Napoleon.

"Three lire!" he mutters. "Corpo di Dio!—have I as much as three lire?"

"Well—supposing you have not enough change .... where do they live?"

"You'd be going to the Osteria del Capello, if I told you!"

"What, the old house of the Capuleti? Does she live there?"

"Where else would one expect La Giulietta to live, I wonder?" grins the cripple, restoring the leather bag to the obscurity of his breeches pocket.

"All right—you may keep the change."

And the sailor, sauntering away with the dearly-bought volume under his arm, crosses over to the shady side just in time to see the object of his enquiries meekly kissing the hand, and apparently receiving the benediction, of a plump little white-haired

priest in rusty black soutane and shovel hat, at the farther end of the Piazza.

"Who is he?" asks one of the bystanders at Il Grillo's stall.

"Eh! eh! How should I know? some salt-water chap with more money than brains! Ten francs for that rubbishing old copy of Guarini's Pastor Fido, which is worth about fifty centesimi!—I call that a good morning's work!"

CHAPTER V.

IN THE AMPHITHEATRE.

STEFANO BENI, shaping the spokes of a cartwheel in the great archway which served him for a workshop, found his light obscured, and, without looking round, said:—

"Is that you, Matteo?"

"It is not Matteo, uncle—pretty Tito! good Tito!"

And Giulietta put down her basket that she might respond to the greetings of Tito, a magnificent black cat who lived and had his being in Uncle Stefano's workshop.

"You here, my niece? Is anything the matter?"

"Only a job for you, Uncle Stefano. I have just seen Padre Anselmo, and he bade me tell you that the tire came off his near wheel, as he drove in this morning from Montorio; and he wants it put to rights immediately."

"That tire again? Body of Bacchus! One cannot go on patching it for ever. Luigi said last time that

the metal was as rotten as tinder. He must have a new one."

(Luigi was the blacksmith under the next archway.)

"He says he cannot afford a new one yet awhile."

"The old story!—waiting, I suppose, till I make him a new wheel, or Luigi puts him a tire for nothing. Ugh! these priests! Grasp all and grudge all—that's their motto."

La Giulietta, sitting on the floor with Tito in her lap, looked up quickly.

"You are quite right, Uncle Stefano," she said, with a somewhat heightened colour. "The motto fits Padre Anselmo like a glove. You remember last winter—how he went from house to house, begging meal from one, oil from another, rice from another—how he got whole sheep and goats from the farmers about Montorio; and how he distributed bread and soup and alms to the sick and the hungry? You remember how old Caterina told us that he himself never tasted meat for weeks together, but gave all his poultry, and the last bottle of wine in his cellar, to the poor of his parish? Then look at his coat—threadbare and patched! I should be ashamed to see you, Uncle Stefano, in a coat half as shabby. Yes, you are quite right. 'Grasp all and grudge all'—that is his motto; but you forgot to add that he grasps all for others, and grudges all to himself."

Stefano Beni—a sallow, hard-featured Lombard—looked up with an odd twinkle in his eye; and, leaning on his mallet, said:—

"When I was in Venice, years ago, I saw a play acted. It was about a merchant who had borrowed money from a Jew, and had pledged a pound of

his own flesh as security for the loan. Well, that merchant's ships were all wrecked, and he could not pay the money; so the Jew demanded his pound of flesh—living flesh, you know, to be cut from nearest the man's heart."

"But it was murder!"

"Ay; it was murder. And yet the lawyers could not save the man, because the forfeit was in the bond. However, the merchant had a sweetheart, and what do you suppose his sweetheart did?"

"Killed the Jew!"

"Better than that. She put on an advocate's wig and gown, and pleaded before the judges, and saved her lover's life."

"That was fine!" said the girl, breathlessly.

"Ay; and the fellow that played the Jew—how he raged and swore! If ever that piece is acted in Verona, I will take you to see it. But I think I have muddled it, somehow, after all. I can't remember clearly whether the girl was the merchant's own sweetheart, or the sweetheart of his friend."

"I don't care whose sweetheart she was," said La Giulietta, regretfully; "but she ought to have killed the Jew!"

"Humph!—you women are all bloodthirsty," said the wheelwright, with a grim smile. "However, my niece, if I ever get into trouble, you shall put on the wig and gown; for I'll be hanged if you're not the best special pleader in Verona."

The girl put Tito down, and, jumping up, leaned her clasped hands caressingly on the old man's shoulder.

"A good pleader wins his cause," she said; "and

so the little uncle will put a new tire on Padre Anselmo's wheel!"

"I!——I put a new tire? Nonsense, child! Am I a blacksmith?"

"You are a dear, good, clever wheelwright, little uncle; and it is the wheelwright's business to get the tire put on, even though he does not put it on with his own hands. You know I cannot ask Luigi for the tire—so poor as he is, and with so many mouths to feed! He will put it on for nothing—good old Luigi! but the little uncle will pay for the iron."

"Now may the devil fly away with me, if . . ."

"If you refuse to do a good turn to a good man? Ah, but you are not going to refuse, uncle mio. Shall I ask Luigi to send for the wheel?"

"Where is the carretta?"

"At the Golden Sun. Padre Anselmo always puts up at the Golden Sun."

"Humph! Matteo will be back presently—he can fetch it."

"There is my own good, kind . . ."

"Pardon, neighbour Beni—your servant, Signorina Giulietta," said a husky voice in the doorway.

It was a very small, withered, feeble-looking old man, in spectales, and a woollen nightcap, and a shabby snuff-coloured coat reaching to his heels. His name was Citti, and he was Custodian of the Amphitheatre. He also sold curiosities, and wrote "Antiquario" over the door of the archway that served him for porter's-lodge, shop, dwelling, "kitchen and all." His stock in trade consisted of Etruscan and Roman relics grubbed up by himself in the substructions of

the Amphitheatre, or found from time to time by the peasantry round about.

"There is a party of travellers just driven up," he said; "and I have a customer looking through my stock—a real connoisseur, who means buying. If I send him away, he is sure not to come back again; and seeing the Signorina Giulietta . . . ."

"You came to ask me to show the Arena for you? With pleasure, Signor Citti—it will not be the first time, will it? Give me the keys, and I will go at once. Take care of my basket, Uncle Stefano!"

And away ran La Giulietta with the big keys.

"She is a dear, blessed child!" quavered the old custode, looking after her with feeble admiration. "She deserves a good husband."

The wheelwright shook his head.

"Plenty of time for that!" he said, gruffly. "I don't want any nonsense of that sort put into her head, neighbour Citti—remember that."

The travellers, meanwhile, had alighted at the entrance to the Amphitheatre—a father, two daughters, and a courier—all English; the father tall and spare; the daughters long and languid; the courier loaded with wraps, guide-books, and sketching materials.

La Giulietta unlocked the heavy wooden door, dropped her little curtsey as they passed in, and was about to turn the key on the inside, when a man came quickly across from the café opposite.

"One can see the Amphitheatre?" he asked.

It was the seafaring man of the Piazza dei Signori.

"It costs one lira," replied La Giulietta, pointing to a written notice in the custode's window.

She admitted the English party without a word; but the new comer was of her own class, and might not care to pay the fee. The man, however, like most sailors ashore, was free-handed and flush of money, and tossed down his lira as if it were a copper.

"The Amphitheatre is supposed to have been built about the close of the first century, and the beginning of the second," said La Giulietta, repeating the little lesson she had learned from old Citti. "It is contemporaneous with the Coliseum at Rome. The circumference is fourteen hundred and seventy-six feet. The outer diameter of the building from end to end, is five hundred and forty-six feet, by four hundred and thirty-six feet across. The height from the ancient pavement, is one hundred and six feet. The whole is built of fine Verona marble, upon basements of Roman brickwork. Of the outer circuit, which originally consisted of seventy-two arches, only four arches remain. This, if complete, would give only eight arches less than the circuit of the Coliseum."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the tall gentleman, fretfully; "what is the girl jabbering about! Here, Jenkinson—this girl is talking Italian. Ask her to say it again, will you; and tell me what she says. What? Dates and measurements? Pooh! we have all that in Murray. Tell her we don't desire her information. We only want to go round the building."

"I particularly wish to see the dens where the wild beasts were kept," said one of the young ladies.

"And I want to go to the top, to make a sketch," said the other.

The tall gentleman, standing in the middle of the

arena, adjusted his double opera-glass and looked round the rows of ancient marble seats, much as he might have stood up in his stall between the acts and looked round "the house" at the opera.

"Ah, yes," he said. "Very interesting. Very interesting, indeed. Remarkably well preserved. Period of Diocletian, did you say, Jenkinson? Just so. Well, my dears, Jenkinson shall find me a sheltered seat under the lee of the wind, while you go over the building. Jenkinson, I hope you have brought both the fur rugs, and have not forgotten the air-cushion? Really now, we breakfasted so early, that I am inclined to cry '*Panem et circenses*,' and take a biscuit and a glass of sherry. If you were Oxford graduates, my dears, you would not need to be told that '*panem et circenses*' means 'bread and circuses;' the watch-word, so to say, of the turbulent plebs of Imperial Rome—unruly gentlemen whom it was hard enough to keep in good humour by gifts of bread and the bloody shows of the Amphitheatre. You filled up the flask with the same Amontillado, I hope, Jenkinson? The girl will take you round the building, my dears; and Jenkinson will stay with me. Don't be long, please; because there are other things in this town which it is our duty to see, and I have ordered luncheon to be ready at half-past one."

La Giulietta was as good a guide as Citti himself. Armed with the old man's keys, she first took her travellers down to the gloomy dens and dank dark passages underground, where in olden time the beasts were caged and the captives penned for slaughter. Thence she led the way up flights of marble stairs and through winding corridors, to the topmost range

of seats. And now the vast theatre — magnificent under the open sky, sinking away tier under tier to the oval arena far below, like a snowy crater hemming in a frozen lake—lay mapped out marble-white beneath their feet. And beyond the mighty sweep of the parapet, they looked over the city with its palaces and churches, its open places, and its clustering roofs of brown and orange tiles. And there, too, ran the swift river dividing it, like a curved scimitar of flashing steel; and there, climbing the hillsides and fencing it round on every side, were the old walls with their forked battlements and picturesque towers. And beyond all these lay the circling landscape, green and wooded, with its convent-crowned heights, its villas, its vineyards, its ilexes, its cypresses; and the purple line of the Euganean hills; and the snowy peaks of the Italian Tyrol.

The English girls looked round for a moment in silence. Then the younger took out a small sketch-book—the inevitable little Winsor-and-Newton book with its pencil and elastic band—and chose her point of view.

"You are not going to attempt to sketch *this*, Theodolinda?" said the elder, with a slightly satirical stress on the demonstrative pronoun.

"Do you know any cause or just impediment why I should not sketch it?"

"Because—well, because it is impossible."

"*A cœur vaillant, rien d'impossible*," quoted the sketcher, with a cold smile; sharpening the point of her pencil. "Besides, if it amuses me—if it serves to recall the scene by and by?"

To recall the scene! As if a tiny pencilled outline

could recall those fantastic peaks and violet shadows, those blue hills and bronzed cypresses, that arrowy river, those mediæval towers, this marble wonder of symmetry and strength!

"If it were the day of the final conflagration, Theodolinda," said the first speaker, impatiently, "I believe you would sit on a peak and sketch the world in flames!"

"Thanks for the suggestion. Should the opportunity occur in my time, I will act upon it."

Close by where they were standing, between the topmost row of seats and the parapet, there was a rough wooden platform which had been erected for the use of the Government surveyors.

Turning away with a slight shrug, the elder sister mounted this platform; so not only commanding a wider horizon, but looking sheer down the outer wall of the Amphitheatre, which, like a huge cliff, plunged down, rugged and weed-grown and weather-stained, to the piazza below. In that piazza, the busy little world of Verona was coming and going. There were loungers breakfasting outside the cafés; empty market-carts rumbling away towards the Porta Nuova; people hurrying to and fro; itinerant fruit, chestnut, and lemonade vendors sending up their shrill cries; hack carriages in rank for hire, and omnibuses coming in from the Southern terminus, laden with luggage and crowded with passengers. A funeral procession presently emerged from one of the side-streets; an acolyte with a lantern mounted on a staff, a priest with an open book, and a following of hooded penitents bearing a covered bier. And before their dolorous death-chant had died away, there came a burst of military music,

and a regiment of white-coated Austrian infantry marched briskly across the piazza, their bayonets flashing in the sun.

The sketcher, meanwhile, was busy with her pencil; the sailor leaned against the parapet; La Giulietta, resting on the old marble seat a little way back, stole a glance at "*The Fatal Loves of Romeo and Giulietta.*"

"Theodolinda," said the elder sister, from her point of vantage on the platform, "do you remember that beautiful little flower with pink petals shading into violet, which we found last winter at the top of the Coliseum? They told us, you know, that it was one of the flora peculiar to the building, and unknown elsewhere."

"Yes—what of it?"

"Well, I see one here, growing in a crevice of the outer wall of the Amphitheatre."

"Are you sure it is the same?" asked Theodolinda, abstractedly.

"I am confident of it—as confident as one can be from this distance. Unluckily, it is quite out of reach . . . . oh, dear! Don't do that—pray don't! It is too dangerous!"

"What is too dangerous?"

"Why, look at this man . . . . If his foot slips, he will be dashed to pieces!"

The sketcher, without rising, glanced up, and saw only two people where a moment before there had been three. The sailor had vanished. Noting the direction of the lady's eyes—perhaps, gathering something of the meaning of her words—he had slung himself lightly over the parapet, and by help of such hold for hand and foot as he could find in the interstices

and inequalities of the masonry, had let himself down to almost within reach of the flower.

"He must have understood what you said," observed Theodolinda, coolly.

But the other sister—realising what must happen if the man's nerve or muscle failed—held her breath, closed her eyes, and said nothing.

La Giulietta, meanwhile, leaned over, breathlessly. She also realised the man's peril; but she neither closed her eyes nor felt the faintness of terror. She saw that he was agile and cool, and she admired his careless courage more than she feared his danger. Still her cheek paled somewhat, as he went lower, and still lower. His right hand, driven firmly in between the broken joints of the masonry, held on but a little way below the parapet. His right knee rested on a projection lower down. His left foot was planted on the edge of a still lower block—his left hand was stretched down to pluck the flower.

But the flower was just a little beyond his reach. He bent lower, and as he bent, the veins of his right hand stood out, and the knuckles showed white below the skin. The man's life hung by that hand!

The Englishwoman, opening her eyes for a moment, uttered a faint exclamation. The girl snatched off her little kerchief, twisted it into a rope, and, with ready presence of mind, held it loopwise, at arm's length, over the edge of the parapet.

He did not see it. He saw nothing but that tiny pink blossom shivering in the breeze, half an inch below his fingers.

He would surely not attempt to go lower!

He paused—steadied himself by a closer grip of

the knee—shifted the fingers of the right hand slowly, cautiously, as an organ-player shifts his fingers on the holding-notes, and wormed his way an inch or two lower.

Now his fingers touch the weed! Now, carefully—as carefully as if he were gathering it from a rock by the roadside—he loosens it round; draws it out, root and all; takes it in his mouth; and, grasping the masonry with a double grip, hoists himself hand over hand till he gets both on the edge of the parapet.

And now, his head having not yet cleared the level, he looks up for the first time—looks up, and meets the girl's eyes looking down. For one second, their two faces are scarce a couple of feet apart—in hers a tremulous emotion; in his, something that sends the quick blood in a torrent, not merely to her cheek, but over throat and brow. She draws back hastily. The next instant he has swung himself over—lighted on his feet—picked up his hat—presented the coveted blossom to the lady on the platform.

"Oh, thank you! *Grazie mille!* But how could you run such a dreadful risk—and for a mere flower?" stammered the Englishwoman, making a vague dash at a word or two of Italian. "It was too dangerous—*troppo pericoloso*, you know!"

He smiled, and made a gesture of dissent.

"You must have understood what I said . . . . do you speak English?"

"A little, Signora."

"Well, you are a brave man; but a brave man should not risk his life for nothing."

"It was no risk, Signora."

The Englishwoman's purse was in her hand.

"I—I am very much obliged to you," she said, hesitatingly.

But our sailor was not one of those who take money for little courtesies.

"At your service, Signora," he said, touching his hat and turning away.

"It is the very same flower—I was sure of it," said the lady, rejoining her sister. "And see, he has had the good sense to get it out by the roots! But it was dreadfully dangerous. I shall never think of it without a shudder."

"I daresay it was not half so dangerous as it looked," replied the sketcher, intent on the curvature of her seats. "Remember that Arab who ran at full speed from the top to the bottom of the second pyramid, at Gheezeh!"

"Ah, well, he does it every day, and gets his living by it. This man would not let me offer him a penny. But what strange animal have we here?"

"An early Christian, I should say, dug up from some of those underground places we were in just now."

It was old Citti, carrying a bundle of shawls and feebly bowing. The Signore down below had sent him with these wraps for the noble ladies. The Signore begged the noble ladies to beware of the cold, and not to forget that the wind was blowing from the north-east. Also he begged them to remember that they had a long giro to make before half-past one o'clock.

"What does he say, Theodolinda?" asked the elder sister, whose Italian was evidently limited.

"I haven't the slightest idea. He talks an unknown tongue—probably ancient Etruscan. Who are you, my good man?"

Old Citti, between bowing and coughing, explained that he was the custodian of the Amphitheatre, and that he had a small collection of antiquities for sale, if the noble ladies would condescend to inspect them as they passed out.

"And you, my blessed child," he added, turning to La Giulietta, "you can now go home; for my customer is gone. And he has bought all my Roman coins—at my own price, too! Don't I always say that you bring me luck? Give me the keys, dear child, and let yourself out by the little door. Here is my pass-key—you can leave it with Uncle Stefano, and I will fetch it away when these travellers are gone."

The girl was not sorry to be released. The morning was wearing on, and she had a piece of embroidery to finish before night. So she took the pass-key, dropped her curtsey to the ladies, and tripped away down the great marble staircases and gloomy passages that had rung so often in olden days to the rush and roar of thousands.

CHAPTER VI.

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT.

"WILL you let me out at the same time, bella Giulietta?"

"You know my name?"

That he should follow her was not surprising. She had perhaps some instinctive foreknowledge that he would do so. But that he should call her by name . . . This startled her.

"How should I not know it?"

"But you are a stranger!"

"Am I a stranger?"

"I never saw you in my life, till I let you into the Amphitheatre."

The sailor looked at her, gravely smiling.

"I stood close to you for some time this morning, at the bookstall in the Piazza dei Signori," he said. "You were buying that ballad that I saw you reading just now—the ballad of Romeo and Giulietta. Will you show it to me?"

"I have not time," she said, shyly.

He was walking beside her—walking slowly, as if to prolong the conversation; and as they went along the vaulted corridor, passing through spaces of shadow and openings of light, there came to them through the broad arches glimpses of the country beyond, and sounds of traffic from the town below.

"Prythee, not so fast!" he said; for she was quickening her pace. "I have much to say to you."

"What can you have to say to me? I do not know you."

"I have as much to say to you as that Romeo in your ballad had to say to Giulietta, the night of their first meeting. I don't ask if you know the story?"

"I have known it from childhood—every word of it."

"They fell in love at first sight, bella Giulietta!"

Still hastening, she looked away.

"There are those who say that love so kindled is the only real love. What do you think, dear donzella?"

"I—I have never thought about it."

"May I tell you what *I* think? Nay, listen to me for an instant! I think that, somewhere or another in the wide world, every human soul has its fellow soul; and that these two—created for each other—too often spend their whole lives seeking, wandering, yet never meeting. But when two such fellow souls *do* meet, then they recognise one another on the instant—know that they belong to one another, at once and for ever! That is the only heaven-born love—that is love at first sight! And it was so that Romeo and Giulietta fell in love here in Verona, five hundred years ago. Their eyes met, and their souls were re-united."

"But they were strangers, for all that!"

"Nay, then, what is it, after all, to be strangers? What does it mean? It means want of sympathy, want of trust, want of mutual knowledge. Are there not parents who, in this sense, are strangers to their own children?—husbands and wives who live together half their lives, and remain strangers to the end? But when the trust and the sympathy are immediate—when true souls meet, and recognise each other at first sight—what then? Now I deny that Romeo and Giulietta were strangers, because they became lovers on the instant; and how can lovers be strangers? Are you and I strangers?"

"I think so."

"And I think—not so. Are you not Giulietta, and am I not Romeo?"

The colour flew to her face.

"Is that your name?" she said.

Then, drawing back mistrustfully:—

"Ah, no! You jest. You are not Romeo!"

"Indeed I do not jest. I am Romeo—for you; if you will have it so!"

They had just come to one of the open arches. He pointed to the blue hills far away.

"Look," he said. "You have known all this from your childhood—as long as you can remember. Yet have you not sometimes felt as if your memory was older than yourself—as if you had seen the sunset on those mountains long, long ago, in other times than ours? And have you never met one whom you knew to be a stranger; but whom, nevertheless, you seemed to remember in some distant past? How can I seem to you as a stranger? To me it seems that I lost you long ago, and have just found you again."

They were now standing in the deep embrasure of the arch; the girl looking away; the man, with ardent eyes, bending passionately towards her.

"I never heard anyone talk as you talk," she said, wonderingly.

"Were you born in that old house in the Via Cappello?"

"I have lived there as long as I can remember anything," she replied; "but I was not born there. I was born at Colognola, up in the hills yonder, among my father's people. My father and mother both died when I was a little child."

"And you have lived since then with your uncle, who is a wheelwright?"

"How do you know that? How do you know that I live in the Via Cappello?"

"One need not be a sorcerer to discover that," he answered. "Besides, where should La Giulietta live,

if not in the house of her forefathers? But will you not let me see your ballad? By whom is it supposed to be sung—by the lover or the lady? What! not one glimpse, fair Giulietta? You are obdurate!"

"Indeed, I cannot stay. Listen! the clocks are striking! It is already nine."

"A moment longer! Does it seem strange to you that I dare to talk to you of love—I, who never saw you till to-day? To me, it is not strange. All my life long, I have been dreaming of the woman I could love. I have waited for her, till I was weary of waiting—I have sought for her, till I was weary of seeking. And now, now at last, dear Giulietta, my waiting is rewarded—my dreams have come true."

He took her hand, and for a moment she let it rest in his before she withdrew it. Truly no man had ever talked to her as this man talked! She listened, half bewildered, half trembling. She did not quite understand what he meant—whether he was talking of the present or the past; but only that he was talking of love.

"Did that lady ask you to get her the flower?" she asked, presently.

"No; but she said to her sister that she wished for it. We sailors climb, you know, like cats; and to gather it was easy. I only wish the flower had been for you!"

"And you understood her foreign tongue?"

"Enough for that. I have sailed many seas, and eaten the bread of many nations. It would be strange if I had not picked up a few words here and there."

He had sailed many seas! A man whose home

was on the deep; here to-day, and gone to-morrow! She knew a girl up at Colognola who married a sailor; and when they had been two months wedded, the sailor joined his ship and went away to sea. That was three years ago; and to this day the girl knew not whether she was wife or widow. And Giulietta remembered how the village gossips shook their heads and vowed they had foretold it; for your sailor, they said, is ever faithless! And this man with the grave voice, and the ardent eyes, and the sweet, persuasive words, like spoken music . . . would he not be faithless, like the rest? The thought stung her with quick pain. But she said nothing; only her cheek paled a little as she stood with averted face, looking over towards the hills.

All at once she felt his breath upon her hand—the hand which held the key. She drew it back quickly.

"No, cara," he said, "I was not going to kiss it. I would not so much as kiss the hem of your garment by stratagem. But what is the matter?"

"Cielo! Do you hear the clocks? Another quarter gone, and the day's work all to do! What will Uncle Stefano say to me when I take him the key?"

Cinderella herself never ran more swiftly when the clock struck twelve than La Giulietta now ran down the time-worn steps and echoing corridors. If the sailor had not been as good at running as at climbing, he would have found it a hard matter to keep up with her. In vain, as he ran, he entreated her not to mind about the key. She might leave it with him, and he would take care that old Citti had it safely when the travellers left.

But she only shook her head and ran the faster.

"When shall I see you again?" he asked, as they traversed the last passage.

"How can I tell?"

"Will you go to market in the morning? Ah, no—I remember. There will be no market again till Thursday. Will you come here—to the Arena?"

"No, no—impossible!"

"Perhaps you may be going to mass?"

"To mass!—on a week-day morning! Do you take me for a fine lady?"

"Well, then, to vespers! Surely you sometimes go to vespers?"

"Sometimes—not often."

They had now reached "the little door," as it was called. It would have been a big door anywhere else. And now, because she was agitated and in haste, La Giulietta could not turn the key.

"Let me try," said the sailor.

But the lock was obstinate; and the more he tried it, the less it would open.

"You will go to vespers to-morrow, dear donzella?" he urged. "Say that you will! Where shall it be? At San Zenone? Or is San Zenone too far from your home? You will not? So! it turns at last! Shall I not take charge of the key?"

But the girl—besides that she had left her basket in the workshop—would not give up her trust. She had promised to leave the key in Uncle Stefano's hands, and that she must do, to the letter.

"Then it is Addio, but not for long," he said, as he locked the door on the outside and gave her back the key.

She lifted her dark lashes; gave him one shy, swift glance; whispered "Addio," and was gone.

Then he stood looking after her till she reached the fifth archway to the left, under which was her uncle's workshop.

And neither he nor she observed how the driver of a passing vettura checked his horse to stare at them; witnessed their parting; and then—having a fare inside and a load of luggage on the roof—whipped on savagely, with rage in his heart and an oath between his teeth.

She had never said "Addio" to 'Tonio Moretti with such a look as that!

CHAPTER VII.

STEFANO BENI'S UNWELCOME VISITORS.

The sailor crossed the piazza, and took a chair under the awning in front of a café, where a number of men of the better class were breakfasting al fresco. Here he called for a cup of chocolate, and sat watching till La Giulietta should come from her uncle's workshop. He had not long to wait. Before his chocolate was brought, he saw her on the threshold. She lingered a moment, as if listening to some one within; cast a hurried glance round the piazza; and then sped swiftly away, past the guard-house and down the Via Piazza Brà. She did not see him, and he did not move. He only followed her with his eyes as long as she was in sight.

"Chocolate, Signore?" said a sleek waiter, deposit-

ing his tiny tray upon the little table on which the sailor's elbow was resting.

The man's manner was a trifle off-hand, as if he thought this pilot-coated seaman out of place among his gentlemen customers.

"How much?" asked the sailor, his hand already in his pocket.

"One lira."

Pilot-coat threw down a two-lire piece.

"You may bring me a cigarette, and keep the change."

The sleek waiter became suddenly respectful. His gentlemen customers who habitually dawdled away their mornings at the café were not wont to fee him in this way. They would send him to and fro, grumble at the quality of the absinthe, read all the journals in succession, keep possession of their tables the whole morning long, and not give him more than ten centesimi for himself when all was done.

The sailor, however, observed neither his incivility nor his civility. Slowly smoking his cigarette, he sat looking dreamily before him, seeing and hearing nothing. Meanwhile, the Englishman and his daughters came out from the Amphitheatre, entered their carriage, and drove away; old Citti hobbled along as far as the fifth archway, to claim his key; Stefano Beni emerged from the depths of his workshop, and held a conversation with Luigi the blacksmith over Padre Anselmo's wheel; a mountebank in a gaily-painted cart took up his station in the piazza, and discoursed of quack medicines to an impromptu audience; people and vehicles passed and repassed, and the life of the place grew noisier and busier as the day waxed hotter.

But of all this the smoker, absorbed in his own thoughts, was as unconscious as if Verona and its Amphitheatre were a hundred miles away.

By-and-by, having come to the end of his cigarette, he roused himself, and got up with a bright, assured look, as if he had made up his mind upon some difficult question. And then, without looking to right or left, he walked straight across to the fifth arch-way.

"Good morning, Signor Beni. May I speak to you for five minutes?"

La Giulietta's uncle, having passed on the priest's wheel to his neighbour, had gone back to the shaping of his spokes. Seeing this stranger at the door, he put down his tools and wiped his hands on his apron.

"Surely," he said; and pointed to a three-legged stool, which was the only seat he had to offer.

But the sailor preferred to stand.

"Not till I have told you my business."

The wheelwright looked at him with curiosity.

"It is not often," he said, "that a man of your calling does business with a man of my calling."

"It is not with your calling that I am concerned, Signor Beni," replied the sailor; "but with your niece."

"My niece! What have you to do with my niece?"

"I wish to make her my wife."

A sullen flush mounted slowly over Stefano Beni's sallow face.

"Who are you?" he asked, abruptly.

"I come from Bari. My name is Cesare Donato. I am a merchant seaman, and I sail my own vessel. I have worked hard, and been fortunate. I want no dowry with the woman I marry."

"Since when have you known my niece?"

"Since this morning."

"This morning! What do you mean by 'this morning'?"

"I mean that I saw her by chance just now, in the market-place, and that I followed her into the Arena."

"Never till this morning? Never before?"

"Never."

The wheelwright laughed contemptuously.

"Go!" he said. "You are mad."

"Do I look like a madman?"

"You talk like one; that is worse."

The sailor smiled gravely.

"Here is my passport," he said, pulling out a well-worn pocket-book, and producing a much stamped and counter-signed document. "I have not my ship's papers with me; but I will fetch them from Venice."

"Your passport and your ship's papers are nothing to me," said the wheelwright, roughly. "I tell you, the thing is impossible."

"Why impossible?"

"For a thousand reasons."

"Name five."

"One is enough. Because you are a stranger, and I know nothing about you."

"That is an objection that cures itself daily. I am less a stranger to you now than I was ten minutes ago; and when we have known each other for a month, it will be as if we had been acquainted all our lives."

"But if I don't choose to know you at all—what then?"

"Then one or other of us will have to put up with an annoyance. Either I must be disappointed of the pleasure of your friendship; or you must tolerate mine. But, good Signor Beni, why need we waste words? I am an honest man, and a prosperous. I love your niece, and I will settle twenty-five thousand lire upon her and her children the day of our marriage. Can I say fairer?"

Stefano Beni bit his lip. He was bewildered; angry; impatient. He knew not what to say. The man looked honest, and spoke frankly. To test the truth of his statements would not be difficult. Supposing all was as he represented it to be, would he, Stefano, be justified in maintaining an attitude of opposition? He loved his niece dearly—as dearly as if she were his own daughter; but his love was not without a touch of selfishness. He had never said to himself that he wished his little Giulietta to live unwedded for his sake; but the future held few possibilities more unwelcome than that of her marriage. And yet . . . a man so well-to-do as this stranger! A man willing and able to place her in a position beyond the reach of worldly needs and dangers! Twenty-five thousand lire! To a man in Stefano Beni's rank of life, twenty-five thousand lire (a thousand pounds English) is a handsome fortune.

"How can I tell that you would do all this?" he said, sullenly; "how can I tell that what you say is true?"

"Give me till the day after to-morrow, and I will satisfy you on every point. If you like to come with me to Venice, you shall see my ship. As for the money, I will lodge it here, in Verona, in the hands of any banker you please to name."

"And what then? My girl is not to be bought and sold like a bale of merchandise!"

"God forbid! No, Signor Beni—I know that. Let me convince you; and then let me take my chance with the donzella. That is all I ask."

But Cesare Donato's "all" was more by far than Stefano Beni was willing to concede. That "all" was neither more nor less than the small end of an iron wedge in an iron hand.

Driven into a corner, the wheelwright considered for a moment—not as to what he should say, but as to how he should say it.

"See here, Signor Donato," he answered presently, with a dogged slowness of utterance. "You have been plain with me—I will be plain with you. I am in no haste to get my girl married. The longer she stays with me, the better content shall I be. But when she marries—if marry she must—it shall not be to such an one as you."

"What do you mean by 'such an one' as I? Am I blind, or dumb, or a hunchback?"

"You are not one of us. You say you come from Bari. That is just as if you said you came from America. I know nothing about Bari; except that it is hundreds of miles away—as far away as America, for aught I can tell. Your people are not our people; your ways are not our ways. We are of the north—you are of the south. We are of the land—you are of the sea. It will not do. Let there be an end of it."

"I cannot take that answer from you, Stefano Beni."

"You will have to take it," said the wheelwright, roughly.

"I may have to take it; but it will be from herself. I claim only fair treatment and a fair chance. Make enquiry as to my character and my means. Sift the question as much as you please. It is your right. Or I will myself lay the proofs before you; and to insist on your investigation of them is my right. The rest concerns your niece."

The wheelwright burst into an angry laugh.

"By the body of Bacchus!" he said, "this is good! A fellow whom I never saw before, and whom I wish never to see again, walks into my workshop, tells me he has taken a fancy to my niece at first sight, and refuses to accept 'No' for an answer!"

"I deny that you have the right to say 'No,' unless you show that I am unworthy, and a liar."

"Worthy or unworthy, true or a liar, it's all one to me. I disapprove; and that's enough."

"I beg your pardon," said Donato. "It is a great deal too much. To watch over your niece's interests, to protect her against a spendthrift, a drunkard, or a thief, is your duty. But you are not justified in standing between her and an honest man who would settle his money upon her, and make her a good husband."

"I have said my last word. I disapprove. Good morning."

And Stefano Beni took up his chisel and mallet with the air of a man who had no more time to waste in idle argument.

"Then I say again that I will accept no refusal but hers. In the meanwhile, I go to Venice for my papers. Till we next meet, Signor Beni."

With these words, the sailor lifted his hat and left the workshop.

Then Stefano Beni fell to work savagely, and the chips flew from his chisel-point like sparks from a smith's anvil. Was ever man so tried—so defied—so thwarted? His little Giulietta, forsooth! His pearl of girls! His very own! She whom he had fed, sheltered, cherished in the core of his heart, since she was a tiny, toddling child—she for whom he had been secretly scraping and saving year by year, as persistently as if she were the offspring of his own loins! That a fellow like this—a foreigner as one might almost say—should dare to cast covetous eyes upon her . . . . Holy Madonna! it was enough to enrage a saint! Was it for this that he had taken such pride in her education, sending her to the Carmelite school daily for nine long years, till she could not only read and write as well as the nuns themselves, but embroider better than any other skilled workwoman in Verona? Was it for this that he had worked summer and winter, week-days and festas, counting every lira, grudging nothing for the good of the little one, and denying everything to himself? *Corpo e sangue!*—no. And this man alleged that he, Stefano Beni, was not "justified" in his refusal! "Justified," indeed! A fellow like this to talk of justice! Should he rear a delicate and precious flower, shelter it, water it, train it with infinite pains and care; and when it came at last to perfection, should it be rudely plucked by the rough hand of a passing stranger? Would that be justice? "An honest man," forsooth! As if there were not scores of honest men in Verona as good as he! Let him take his honesty and his money to another market, and the devil go with him!

Such was the indignant tenour of Stefano Beni's

meditations. Like most taciturn men, he could be sufficiently angry when roused; and on the present occasion, he was wroth exceedingly. So he chiselled and hammered, and muttered and fumed, till he had worked off a little of his superfluous heat; then wiped the perspiration from his brow; drank a long draught of cold water from the old green pitcher that always stood on the corner shelf; and went in next door to see how his neighbour the blacksmith was getting on. Here he found his own apprentice, Matteo, assisting to hold the wheel, while Luigi hammered on the tire. The job, in fact, was nearly done.

"Look here, neighbour," he said, presently; "you have more book-learning than I, and know more about places. Can you tell me anything about Bari?"

"About Bari?" the blacksmith repeated. "Well, not much. It's a good long way off, down in the south country."

"But it is in Italy?"

"Oh, yes—it is in Italy."

"And a seaport?"

"Surely—a seaport on the Adriatic coast. You may see plenty of Bari trading-vessels at Ancona and Venice. Our neighbour Sacchi, who understands the wholesale business as well as any man in the town, gets all his oil from Bari. Being brought by sea to Venice, it comes cheaper than the oils of Florence and Lucca, which have to be brought across the Appenines."

"Then it is a place doing a brisk trade?"

"None more so. Don't you know the proverb—'Bari for oil; Trani for figs; Otranto for pretty women'? But why do you ask?"

To this question the wheelwright made no reply;

but stood looking silently on, while the last nails were driven.

"I will settle with you for this job, Luigi," he said; "and Padre Anselmo can settle with me."

He did not choose the blacksmith to know that the cost of the tire was to come out of his own pocket. That was a secret between his little Giulietta and himself; and perhaps he was also a little ashamed of his weakness in the matter. Then—having to send the wheel back to the Golden Sun—he bade Matteo call round by way of the Osteria del Cappello, and tell his niece that he was too busy to come home at mid-day to dinner.

"Got a pressing job on hand, neighbour?" asked the blacksmith, who had his share of curiosity.

Stefano Beni looked glum and shrugged his shoulders.

"No," he said; "but I'm out of sorts to-day, and have no stomach for my food. That's all."

And so, with a nod, he walked off to the cook's-shop at the corner of the Vicolo San Nicola, and bought him half a loaf of black bread and a plate of beans and oil; upon which frugal fare, washed down with another draught from the green pitcher, he presently made his solitary meal.

His rage was over now; but his thoughts were gloomy, and his heart was full of bitterness. He wondered, as he lit his pipe and sat brooding in the inner gloom of his den, if there was in all Verona a man more ill-used than himself.

All at once, breaking upon the mid-day stillness of the almost empty piazza, there came a sound as of some vehicle furiously driven; and the next moment —almost before he had raised his head to look—a

hack vettura dashed up to his door. The vettura was empty; the horse was reeking; the driver jumped down, whip in hand, and walked in without ceremony.

It was 'Tonio Moretti, looking pale and excited.

"Good morning, neighbour Beni," he said. "I feared you were gone home to dinner."

"You feared wrongly, then," growled the wheelwright, without taking his pipe from his lips. "Anything the matter?"

"Yes—I have something very important to say to you."

"It must needs be very important, to make you drive like that!"

"The matter is this," said the young vetturino, boldly. "I love your niece Giulietta. You know me. You know that my father left me five thousand lire; and that my vettura and my two horses are my own. I can keep a wife in comfort. Will you give me La Giulietta's hand in marriage?"

For a moment, Stefano Beni stared at him in angry stupefaction; then jumped to his feet, and shivered his pipe into a dozen pieces.

"What! another of you?" he exclaimed. "Diavolo! it is too much."

CHAPTER VIII.

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

"THEN it is Addio—but not for long."

Those were his words. How well she remembered them! How well she remembered the way in which

they were said—the tone, so resolute and so tender! Sure Romeo himself never looked and spoke more like a princely lover!

And now the morrow was come—the morrow on which he had urged her to meet him at the Arena, at San Zenone, at matins, at vespers; and she had refused all his entreaties. Except on market days, La Giulietta rarely passed the boundary which divided the little inner world of the Osteria del Cappello from the outer world of streets beyond the gate; and on this particular morning, if even she had needed to go into the town, she told herself she would have put up with any inconvenience rather than seem to seek a meeting.

But it so happened that she needed nothing out of doors. She had sent her embroidery home last evening, and must now begin another piece for the same employer. So it was a day to sit at work while daylight lasted.

In the meanwhile, she would not even go down to the well; for there the gossips were congregated as usual, and there 'Tonio Moretti was loitering, also as usual, casting impatient glances towards her balcony, and wondering why she was so late. But he might wait, and he might wonder; and when he was tired of waiting and wondering, he might go! What right had he to waylay and annoy her every morning with his unwelcome courtship? How dared he call her "Cara Giulietta?"

"Good Brigita," she said, interrupting one of the neighbours on her way down stairs, "will you fill my can for me? I am so busy this morning!—and I will do as much for you another day."

And Brigita, who was a good-natured soul, and

wife to the lame clog-maker on the fourth floor, smiled knowingly as she took the big brass can from the girl's hand, and said:—

"With pleasure, Giulietta mia; but there is one below who has been looking for you this last half-hour. Ah! ah! I used to pretend to be hard-hearted myself sometimes, when I was of your age, and Carlo was courting me!"

So 'Tonio Moretti, having lingered till half-past seven, went his way, whereby he again missed the early arrival from Milan, and missed it for nothing.

La Giulietta, meanwhile, made haste with her household work; dusting and washing up; polishing her uncle's carved oak chair, and rubbing the old brass dishes and the tall classically shaped lucerne, till they shone like burnished gold. Then, having prepared her vegetables for the soup, watered the flowers in her balcony, fed her linnet, and done all that perfect cleanliness and order could do to make the place pretty and home-like, she brought out her work-basket, and her bag of coloured silks, and her reels of gold and silver thread, and settled down to the day's embroidery.

Such was the routine of her daily life; and she was wont to pursue it as contentedly as if there were no gay shops in the Via del Corso, and no sweet country walks beyond the walls. When it was neither too hot in summer nor too cold in winter, she would carry her chair out upon the balcony; and there, with bent head and busy fingers, singing softly to herself, she plied her needle in the sunshine.

But to-day she stayed within; sitting a little way back from the open window, and screened by a climb-

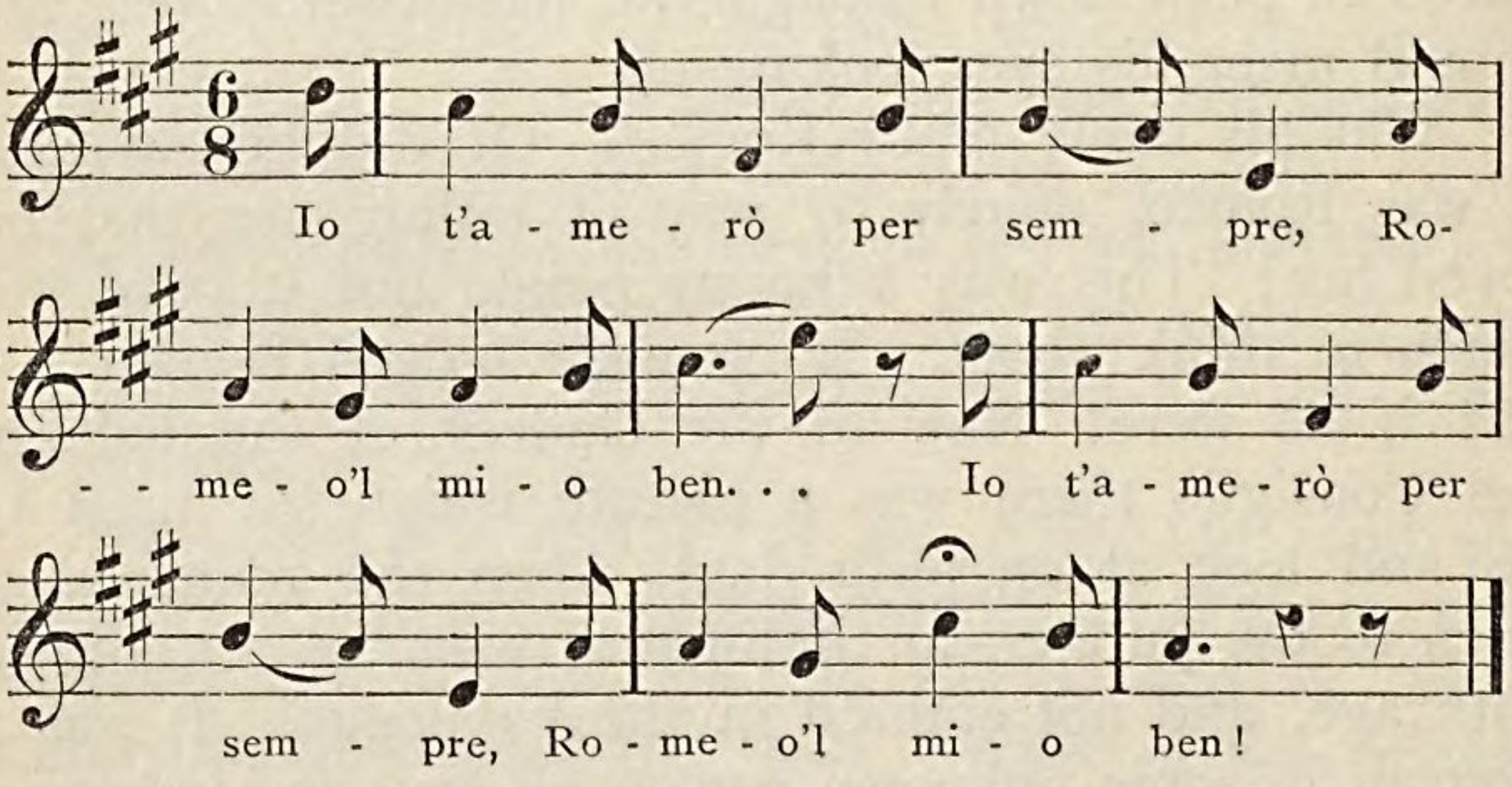
ing bower of nasturtiums and convolvuli, which all the summer it had been her delight to train. From here she commanded a peep over one side of the courtyard, and could see, not only the archway surmounted by the ancient cognisance of the Capulets, but also the customers going in and out of the trattoria; the serving-maid carrying the dishes across from the kitchen; the cobbler in his stall in the corner; and old Anita roasting her chestnuts under the gateway.

"Then it is Addio; but not for long!"

The words ran in her head like a tune. "Not for long"—but for how long? Would he try to see her again to-day? What if he were even now in the street outside, seeking for the house? What if he were just coming into the courtyard? If she saw him standing there in the shade, what would she do? She hardly dared to peep down through the nasturtiums, lest she should meet his eyes looking up.

Was his name really Romeo? Or did he say that it was Romeo, merely by way of telling her that he loved her? This was a knotty point, and it gave her much to think about. If he were indeed Romeo . . . ah! if he were! Now in the Gallery of the Palazzo del Consiglio there was a picture which she used to go and look at on festa days, when the rooms were open to the public—an indifferent piece of art, brown with age, and not entered in the catalogue. It was a portrait of some unknown personage by some unknown artist, apparently a follower of Giorgione; and it represented a dark-eyed, melancholy looking man with black hair, and a forked beard, and a gold chain about his neck, and his right hand resting on the hilt of a jewelled dagger. A mere child of the people,

inheriting the people's instinctive love for art, but utterly ignorant of styles, periods, schools, and the data of costumes, the girl had long since made up her mind that this sixteenth-century personage was the hero of the ancient love-story. She had interrogated the old canvas, and she fancied that it had told her its story. But alas! her Romeo of yesterday was not in the least like her Romeo of the Palazzo del Consiglio. His hair and beard were of a reddish brown; his eyes were grey; he had nothing of the fatal look of the man in the old picture.

Then she brought out her ballad (it was in twenty-four verses!) and set herself to learn it by heart. And as she matched her silks and planted her stitches, she sang over and over again the refrain with which each stanza ended:—

Last evening, she sent home a slip of bordering for an altar-cloth. This morning she was beginning on a white satin stole, to be by-and-by covered by her busy fingers with a mediæval pattern of crimson roses alternating with golden oak leaves and silver acorns. The

design, drawn upon vellum and richly coloured, lay beside her on the table. A dainty handicraft! It was no wonder that her little hands were soft and delicate.

"Io t'amerò per sempre
Romeo 'l mio . . ."

Was that a tap at the door?

The needle dropped from her fingers. She held her breath, listening, not daring to move.

The tap was repeated.

That he should actually come to the house—that he should venture to mount the stairs—that he should dare to knock at the door . . . . this was what she had not foreseen! What must she do? To admit him was out of the question. Did he suppose that any modest maiden would do that? Surely he was too bold! She had but one course open to her. She must keep silent, and not open the door.

Then there came a third tap, and a boyish voice (not his voice!) cried, impatiently:—

"Ho, there! Is no one within?"

She ran to the door and opened it at once; and there stood a lad with a basket.

"The Signorina Giulietta Beni?"

"I am Giulietta Beni."

He handed her the basket, and, with a quick "Good day!" touched his cap and was gone.

Flowers! A simple wicker basket lined with moss and full of flowers—such flowers as she had never seen before! Some looked as if made of white velvet; some were like wax, semi-transparent, pink and creamy white; some sparkled all over, as if iced or crystallised;

and some were more like butterflies than blossoms. Most wonderful of all was a star-shaped crimson flower with a jewelled heart, like a cluster of rubies in a golden setting.

The girl hung over them, breathless, bewildered, dazzled. Such flowers, surely, could only grow in Paradise!

Then, one by one, being almost afraid to touch them, she took them out; and there at the bottom lay a single white rose-bud, with a slip of paper twisted about its stem; and on this paper was written in pencil—"*Romeo a Giulietta.*"

All the rest of that day she shut herself up in the house; working, it is true, yet making little progress. Could she help it, if her thoughts wandered and her hands now and then lay idle in her lap? She hid the basket in her own room at dinner-time, not daring to let the wondrous Paradise-flowers be seen by Uncle Stefano; and in the evening, when it became dusk, she stole down with a handful of the fairest for Our Lady's shrine in the courtyard.

So the hours went by; and when night came, her sleep took up the sweet dreams of the day. Then the moon, mounting slowly behind the roofs at the back where once was Capulet's garden, flooded the ancient house and its surroundings with a tender glory; and by-and-by the silver stream flowed in at the window of the room in which she slept, stealing along the wall; creeping towards the table at her bedside; travelling with imperceptible motion from her beads to her missal, from her missal to the single rose-bud in its tumbler of water standing nearest to her pillow. And when it slid presently to the face of the sleeper, the

girl's lips parted in a happy smile, as if that wandering ray carried a message, or a kiss, from the white bud on the table to the crimson blossom of her mouth.

CHAPTER IX.

"CRABBED AGE AND YOUTH."

"My little girl," said Stefano Beni, taking his pipe from his lips, "you are happy, aren't you? As happy as Lotta and Lisa, for instance?"

It was evening—the evening of the second day after his interview with Cesare Donato. Giulietta, meanwhile, had heard no more of her stranger-lover; but the wheelwright had this very afternoon received another visit from him. Donato had been to Venice and back during the forty-eight hours; and had brought with him his ship's papers, a bundle of bills of lading, invoices, and the like; all of which, including his passport, and some letters written by a certain Canon Alassio of Bari, in whose parish Donato owned a small property, the wheelwright had been unwillingly constrained to examine. That the man was respectable and respected—all, in short, that he represented himself to be—was evident enough. So much, at least, Stefano Beni was bound to admit. Not many maidens in his little girl's rank of life had the chance of marrying so well;—that also could not be denied. As Donato's wife, she would never need to turn her hand to household work; she would hold her head as high as the wife of any tradesman in Verona; nay, she would almost be a lady! The Canon's letters to

Donato were addressed to Il Capitano Donato. Worried and irritated as he was, Stefano Beni could not but feel a glow of secret pride as he thought of these things.

"My nephew-in-law, the Capitano Donato!"—how grandly it rolled off one's tongue!

The wheelwright could not resist saying it to himself once or twice, as he walked home that evening; and each time that he repeated it, his soul was comforted within him. As for 'Tonio Moretti, it is impossible to say with what scorn La Giulietta's uncle regarded him and his pretensions. A vetturino, forsooth! As if his niece would marry a vetturino! Yet three days ago, although his opposition would have been just as determined, he would have admitted that 'Tonio Moretti was an excellent match, and his pride at least would have been gratified by the offer.

Never in his life had Stefano Beni been so perplexed and so unhappy as during these last forty-eight hours. He had brooded over the thing by day, and lain awake thinking of it by night, till his head and his heart ached. At first he was for sending his niece's lovers to the right-about, and burying the whole episode in oblivion; but this was more easily said than done. Resolute men both, the suitors declined to be summarily dismissed. Each claimed his right to be answered by the girl herself. Thus brought to bay, the wheelwright made up his mind to be beforehand with them. She should know everything; and from his own lips. Besides, he could not but be conscious of an uneasy sense of duty in the matter. Had he any right to stand between her and her possible good fortune? And if she must marry and leave him (for

girls *would* marry), were it not better she married well than ill? Whereby it will be seen that, in so far as Stefano Beni's consent was necessary, Cesare Donato's cause was as good as gained.

And this was why the old man, after sitting moodily by the fire for the best part of the evening, took his pipe from his lips, and asked his little girl if she was happy.

La Giulietta, deftly repairing her uncle's Sunday waistcoat, looked up with a glad smile.

"Happy? I should think so, little uncle! Far happier than Lotta and Lisa, whose mother is always scolding."

"But they have more pleasure than you."

"They go sometimes to the theatre, because their cousin Tomaso gives them tickets; but I don't envy them. I am content to be at home with you."

"I am a dull old fellow to be at home with. Many maidens of your age would by this time be thinking of husbands and homes of their own."

La Giulietta bent over her work, and was silent.

"Have you had no such thoughts, my child?"

"I—little uncle?" she stammered, diligently stitching.

"Ay, you. Why not? You were sixteen your last birthday. . . ."

"Seventeen!" she interposed, quickly.

"Was it seventeen? Dio! how time flies! Well then, you were seventeen last birthday, and are pretty enough for a princess."

"Am I pretty, little uncle? Do you really think I am pretty?"

"Do I think that you don't know all about it better than I do?"

La Giulietta jumped up, and gave him a kiss on each cheek.

"I am so glad I am pretty!" she said, gaily. "I want to be pretty!"

"Tell the truth, and say you want to be admired."

But there the wheelwright was wrong. She had "no such stuff in her thoughts." To be fair in the eyes of one—one only; that was all her ambition.

"I don't care a bit to be admired," she said, going back to her waistcoat-mending. "But for your sake, little uncle, I should be sorry if I was ugly to look at!"

"For my sake! Che! che!—you have been the light of my eyes, from the day I brought you home with me from Colognola—a little motherless mite rolled up in a shawl, sound asleep, and not able to speak six words plainly!"

"That was the day after my mother's death!"

"Ay; and the neighbours thought I was mad, because I didn't pack you off to your father's sister at Naples—she who had never even seen you, and had seven children of her own to look after! 'Not a bit of it,' says I; 'the babe's all that's left to me of my own kith and kin, and who so fit to take her as myself?' And I did take you, then and there. It had been a hot day, I remember, and the evening turned chilly after sun-down; and thankful I was when neighbour Bartolo overtook me in his carretta. 'Want a lift, friend Beni?' says he; 'give me your bundle, and jump up.'—'My bundle's a baby,' says I. You should have seen his face! God knows, I was sad enough; and yet for the life of me I couldn't help laughing!"

"How thankful I am that you did not pack the poor little bundle off to Naples, Uncle Stefano!"

"Still, it might have been better for you, my little girl. You would have been brought up under a woman's eye, and among children like yourself."

"You have been as good to me as any woman—and better!"

"Well, well—your Aunt Francesca Petrucelli, rich as she is, has her own family to provide for; and what few lire I have scraped together are all for you, my child! Shall I tell you what has been in my mind this many a year? I have thought that by and by, perhaps, I might manage to buy a bit of ground on one of the hillsides yonder, and build a little house on it for you and me. I should like to sit in the shade of my own vine and eat polenta of my own growing, before I die."

"Dear Uncle Stefano, you will never be rich enough for that!"

"How can you tell? And then I have also thought that—who knows?—the Madonna might some day send us an honest, industrious lad whom I could love as a son, and who would make a good husband for my Giulietta."

Again she made no reply. What could she say?

"You don't want to live and die a nun, do you, my child?"

"Dear little uncle—the future will take care of itself!"

There was a momentary silence. He saw that she was embarrassed; and her embarrassment added to his difficulty.

"I think I know of one who would be glad enough

to take care of your future, my little girl," he said, presently.

She dropped the button she was about to sew on, and stooped to look for it.

"'Tonio Moretti wishes you well."

He said it with a sinking heart; for he had begun to fear that she might not be indifferent to the good-looking vetturino.

"'Tonio Moretti? I detest 'Tonio Moretti!"

"But all the girls are in love with him!"

"Then they are not of my mind, Uncle Stefano."

"When little maidens say they 'detest' a man, it sometimes means that they like him very much indeed," said the wheelwright, anxiously.

"And when I say that I detest 'Tonio Moretti, it means that I hate the sight of his face and the sound of his voice, and that I would go half-an-hour out of my way any day, rather than meet him!"

The old man was puzzled, but not convinced. It might be a lovers' quarrel, after all.

"Maybe he has offended you?"

"He is always offending me. His very name offends me. Dear little uncle, don't speak to me of 'Tonio Moretti—I have never liked him, and nothing would ever make me like him."

"I don't want you to like him—or anyone, for that matter," said the wheelwright, with a sigh of relief. "I'd rather keep my little girl to myself for a few years longer—if I can."

He waited, looking at her wistfully.

"If I can!" he repeated.

Still she made no reply.

"There is a certain Cesare Donato, by the way . . . do you know him?"

She vaguely repeated the name. No—she had never heard it.

"He knows you."

"He is welcome."

"He—body of Bacchus! I may as well out with it at once. He asks you in marriage."

"She looked up, laughing somewhat nervously.

"I am much obliged," she said. "Who is he?"

"A man older than 'Tonio Moretti, and better off—a rich man, in fact. What you women call 'a good match.'"

"One of your customers, little uncle?"

"No; a stranger."

"But it is ridiculous!"

"You are sure you know nothing of him?"

"I never heard of him in my life."

"Still, you must have seen him. Think, my child—you showed some travellers over the Arena, the other day" . . .

She looked startled. A doubt flashed across her. Yet he said "a rich man." No; it was impossible. Her Romeo was as poor as herself.

"An old Signore and his two daughters—foreigners," she replied, hesitatingly.

"No one beside? He of whom I speak, this Cesare Donato, is a seaman—master of a trading vessel . . . Ah! You begin to understand!"

Stefano Beni looked at her fixedly, and a dull pain seemed to tighten at his throat.

"So! I see how it is," he said, bitterly; "the old man's day is over."

But she flew to him, and hid her face on his shoulder.

"Dearest, dearest uncle!" she cried, "that can never be! I will only love you the more!"

That is what the young always say; and for the moment, in the joy of their hearts, they believe it. They are so happy that they credit themselves with a boundless capacity for loving. The new tie will but strengthen the old ties; the new hope keep bright the old memories. Nothing shall be changed; no one shall be superseded; all shall be bettered, consolidated, enriched; for is not the Golden Age come back?

So say the young; so go on their way rejoicing. But the old know better. They listen, they smile, they affect to believe; but, like Stefano Beni, they know that their day is over.

CHAPTER X.

IS IT "YES" OR "NO"?

"ENGAGED—and *not* to 'Tonio Moretti? Impossible!"

"Impossible, if you please; but true. It is I who say it."

To lodge in the Osteria del Cappello was to live in a house of glass. The gossips had La Giulietta's engagement at their tongues' ends the very day after Stefano Beni had given his consent. They talked of nothing else that morning round the well.

"I tell you he was there all last evening," said Monna Teresa. "A tall man with a reddish beard; a sailor by his clothes."

"Ay; he had been round to the Arena in the afternoon to see neighbour Stefano, and they returned together. My Giacomo happened to be coming home at the time, and he followed them all the way from the Piazza Brà."

"Old Stefano was minded to treat him well, anyhow," put in another. "He came down himself in the course of the evening, and ordered a fowl and a bottle of Aleatico for supper!"

"Yes," said Brigita, the wife of the lame clogmaker; "and the girl Maria, who took up the tray, told me they had both lucerne lighted, and most beautiful flowers on the table. It was quite a Festa!"

"Well, but who is he?"

"Where does he come from?"

"What is his name?"

"He comes from Venice—I know that for certain," said Brigita.

"What will 'Tonio say?"

"Poor 'Tonio! He'll be fine and angry, I'll warrant."

"And with reason. 'Tonio has not been well treated."

"No, indeed! Why, he has courted La Giulietta for the last twelve months!"

"And now to be turned off for a stranger whom nobody has ever seen before! But there!—he was too good for her."

"Much too good. She never knew how to value him."

"Che! che! che! some girls don't know when they're well off."

"A lad that any lady might have been proud to have for her sweetheart!"

"I don't think much of the one she has put over his head," says Monna Teresa.

Dame Giannetta shrugs her shoulders.

"Neither of *my* girls would look at him," she says, scornfully.

"He is ever so much older than 'Tonio!"

"Five-and-thirty, at the least!"

"And not half so good-looking."

"Then that red beard! Ugh! Not to obey the Holy Father himself would I have married a man with a red beard, when I was a girl!"

"Well, well, there must be something at the bottom of it. He's well off, maybe."

"Absurd!—a sailor, and well off! Those fellows spend their money as fast as they get it."

"I must say I am astonished that neighbour Beni should favour such a match," says Dame Giannetta, going off majestically, with her can upon her head. "I should be sorry, indeed, not to look higher for *my* girls! A sailor, forsooth! I should like to see Lotta or Lisa taking up with a sailor!"

La Giulietta, meanwhile, little dreamed that her secret was even suspected; but because she desired to avoid 'Tonio Moretti, she kept away from the well at the hours when it was most frequented. Whereupon the gossips, taking it for granted that she was avoiding themselves through malice prepense, credited her with pride, slyness, and every unamiable quality under heaven.

"Is it you who have thrown La Giulietta over, or is it La Giulietta has thrown you over, 'Tonio?" asked Dame Giannetta, meeting him in the yard as he was going to dinner. For being alone and a bachelor, the young man generally took his meals at the Osteria.

"What do you mean, Dame Giannetta?" he said, frowning.

"Eh, dear me! we all thought it was going to be a match!"

"Match or no match, what business is it of anyone's?"

"No offence, 'Tonio—only one is surprised, you know."

"Surprised! What the devil are you surprised about?"

"Cielo! haven't you heard? Ah, well—*I'm* no mischief-maker. Good morning, 'Tonio!"

And away went Dame Giannetta, leaving the vetturino to go to his dinner with what appetite he might.

His appetite, however, was not much impaired by the conversation. Perhaps he did not particularly notice what was put before him, or how it was served. Perhaps he washed it down with an extra draught of the thin "black" wine which was the favoured drink of the establishment; but except that he was a trifle more sulky than usual, the young man betrayed nothing of the uneasiness brooding in his breast. Still he *was* uneasy. Stefano Beni had by no means welcomed him as he conceived he ought to have been welcomed. The wheelwright had, in fact, thrown the coldest of cold water on his suit. As for the girl herself, she systematically avoided him. Then what about that stranger in the Piazza Brà? And, above all, what about these hints of Dame Giannetta's?

Too proud to question any of those who could have told him the gossip of the place, he nursed his disquietude till the day's work was done; then made

up his mind to pay a visit to the Benis, and bring matters to an issue. But he went first to his lodging, to smarten himself as became a suitor on his promotion.

He was a self-confident young fellow enough; yet his heart beat quicker as he went up the stairs.

"You here?" said the wheelwright, himself answering the bell.

"May one pay you a little visit this evening, neighbour Beni? I have come to offer my respects to the Signorina Giulietta; and, to-morrow being a Festa, to invite you for a drive in the country. I will put both horses to my vettura, and take you to the Ponte di Veja."

He had conned this little speech over in his mind all the afternoon, and he flattered himself that he delivered it with becoming fluency.

"My niece," said the wheelwright, "place a seat for our visitor."

La Giulietta put down her work, rose silently, and placed a chair as far as possible from her own. She had on her best black gown, a little knot of crimson ribbon at her throat, and a white rose in her hair. The room was full of light. There were flowers on the table. And Stefano Beni was in his Sunday coat. 'Tonio Moretti was not gifted with very keen powers of observation; but he could see that they were expecting a guest.

"I hope I am not unwelcome," he said, half-defiantly; standing with his hand on the back of the chair. "I come as a friend. Do you accept my invitation?"

The wheelwright glanced at his niece.

"We cannot accept it," he replied.

"Cannot!"

"But we thank you all the same."

"'Cannot' means 'will not,' I suppose?"

"Not so. It means we are engaged."

A black frown settled on 'Tonio Moretti's brow.

"You are not engaged for the whole day?" he said, incredulously.

"Yes; for the whole day. We go out early in the morning, and we shall not be back till evening."

"You say that to get rid of me. I don't believe it."

"I need not tell a lie in order to get rid of you, or any other intruder," retorted the wheelwright, wrathfully.

"Oh! I am an intruder, am I?"

"If you want plain speaking—yes."

The vetturino broke into an angry laugh.

"Good," he said. "Now I understand what you mean; but let me tell you—you especially, La Giulietta—that there are plenty here in Verona who would be only too well pleased by the like intrusion."

The girl laid down her work and looked at him for the first time.

"We do not doubt it," she said, gently. "We know you mean kindly. Why need there be rough words on either side? Surely we may thank you for your civility, and decline it, without offence."

"I want to know if you decline *me?*" he said, coming abruptly, and almost fiercely, to the point. "I asked your uncle the other day. I meant to ask you to-morrow. But if I go now, I shall not come back again; so let us out with it. I've courted you nigh upon a year; and you have known well enough what I meant. I—I shouldn't have courted you, if I hadn't

loved you" . . . . (here his voice shook a little, and his look softened.) "Say; how shall it be? Yes, or No?"

The girl turned her face away.

"I am so sorry," she faltered.

"Is it 'Yes,' or 'No'?"

"Enough, my lad! Don't you see that it's 'No'?" interposed Stefano, impatiently. "Take your answer like a man, and have done."

But 'Tonio Moretti never took his eyes from her face.

"I am waiting for my answer," he said, turning very pale.

"Indeed, it must be 'No,'" the girl said, with trembling lips.

"Is it that you like some one else better? Sangue di Dio! I knew it. Well, whoever he is, I wish you joy of him! It's nothing to me. There are dozens of girls—your betters every one—who will jump if I but hold up my finger. So good-bye to you, La Giulietta; and if either of us lives to repent this ending, it won't be I!"

"You are an insolent cub!" shouted the wheelwright, following him.

But the vetturino had flung out of the room, crossed the passage, and already reached the outer door.

Now it chanced that at the moment when he lifted the catch, some one on the outside pulled the bell; whereupon, the door being suddenly opened, he almost ran against a man on the other side of the threshold.

"I beg your pardon," said the coming guest, stepping quickly back.

And by the dim light of the little oil-lamp on the landing, 'Tonio Moretti recognised the stranger of the Piazza Brà.

This was Cesare Donato's second visit in the character of an accepted lover; as that of the previous evening was his first. So far, at all events, the gossips were right. To-morrow, doubtless, they would know that he had used the privilege of a "promesso," and come again; and the very "cakes and ale" with which he was entertained would be no mystery to them. What they did not know, however, was the suddenness with which all these changes had been brought about. That there had been a secret attachment, opposition on the part of neighbour Stefano, slyness, and secrecy, and deception all round—of this they were positive. No amount of evidence would have convinced them that the lovers never met in their lives till little more than a week ago, and that they fell in love at first sight.

The first visit was somewhat formal, as such first visits are wont to be. Donato felt that he was treated as a guest, and to Stefano Beni he knew that he was not altogether a welcome guest. But to-night—possibly because, being angered with the one suitor, he felt more favourably to the other; or perhaps because he was becoming more accustomed to the new order of things—the old man gave his future nephew-in-law a better reception. He even shook hands with him when he came in, and when he went away.

Then, too, they had much to talk about; for, to-morrow being the Festa of some popular saint, all Verona would make holiday; and it was arranged that La Giulietta and her uncle should go with Donato to

Venice for the day, to see his ship, the brig *Diamante*, there lying in harbour. So, what with looking over the train-bill and planning the excursion, this second evening passed not only smoothly, but pleasantly. They were to start early in order to have a long day, and Donato proposed that they should take the first express, leaving Verona at 7 A.M. This would give them some nine or ten hours in Venice, and allow for returning in good time in the evening.

"If I come for you at half-past six to-morrow morning, it will not be too soon," he said, at parting. "And I will bring a vettura; unless you prefer one from the yard below?"

But a vettura from the yard was not to be thought of. Neither was it desirable that he should come to fetch them when 'Tonio and all the gossips were about. So the wheelwright suggested that they should meet at the station; and thus it was settled.

"Weather permitting, you know," said old Beni.

"I promise a south-east wind, a cloudless sky, and sunshine from dawn till dusk."

"Nay, nay," said La Giulietta, seriously. "Our Lady alone can do that."

But she secretly resolved to propitiate the Madonna that very night with a special taper.

CHAPTER XI.

THE "DIAMANTE."

THE Madonna, doubtless, permitted herself to be propitiated; for the weather next day turned out just as Donato predicted. Never was autumn morning

more brilliant; the air crisp and cool; the sky a dome of liquid blue; hills, plain, and city flooded with sunshine. At five, the bells began clanging from the campaniles; and at half-past six, the wheelwright and his niece passed out through the courtyard, and took their way towards the Somma Campagna station.

The Strada Vicentina is a long, hot road; and they had the sun full in their faces all the way. But Stefano Beni was the last man in the world to fling away a couple of lire on coach-hire, even though it was a Festa. So they trudged on amid a stream of pedestrians bound for the same goal; and presently 'Tonio Moretti, with new rosettes at his horse's head and a camellia in his button-hole, drove past them at a gallop; his vettura full of Austrian soldiers. The girl shrank back, and clung to her uncle's arm; but the rejected suitor, seeming not to see them, vanished in a cloud of dust.

But who is this, in uniform of navy blue all glittering with anchor buttons, coming forward at the station to meet them?

Not Cesare Donato?

He has a gold band to his cap, and gold braid on his cuffs and collar. He looks like an admiral. So, at least, thinks La Giulietta, silent and shy, and half afraid of her lover in his splendour.

"The master of a vessel bringing visitors aboard his ship on a Festa day, is bound to appear in uniform," he says, apologetically. "It is a question of discipline."

A question of discipline! The girl began dimly to understand that this Cesare whom she had already

learned to look upon as her very own, belonged to a class far above that in which she had herself been born and bred. That he was master of a trading-craft, that he was well-to-do, that he was what Uncle Stefano called "a good match"—all this she had been told; but it had made slight impression on her. Now, for the first time, she realised that he was a man whom other men obeyed.

They are presently seated in a second-class compartment, bound for Venice; La Giulietta and her uncle on one side; Donato opposite. Old Stefano has insisted on paying for his niece's ticket and his own, notwithstanding that he is secretly of opinion that third-class seats in the cheap train which leaves after the express, would have answered their purpose as well.

The girl has never been to Venice. Only once before has she travelled by rail. That was to Mantua and back by an ordinary market-train, some three or four years ago. At first, the express speed frightens her. She scarcely dares to watch the flying landscape. But this terror soon wears off; and presently Donato draws her attention to two castles on a solitary hill—the one standing high in picturesque ruin; the other half way between the plain and the summit, and comparatively modern. These are the castles of the Montecchi. That shattered stronghold above is at least as old as the famous feud; and Romeo was probably born within its walls.

Now they pass Vicenza with its lofty tower, and Padua with its domes. Then come marshy flats; and soon a broad river is crossed, and Mestre is reached, and beyond Mestre lies a silver lake stretching away

to the horizon. Quaint fishing-boats with parti-coloured sails glide slowly here and there across that placid waste; yonder are some three or four black specks of gondolas; and far away, from the midst of a low-lying bank of soft warm haze, rise the shadowy towers and cupolas of Venice.

Now the train enters upon the long bridge, and the shining waters are all around them. The mainland becomes a strip of sand in the distance; the dream-like city rises higher and nearer; and then, all at once, they slacken speed, run under cover, and come to a dead stop in a station—a big, common-place railway terminus like any other, full of clamour and bustle.

"It's all very well," says Uncle Stefano; "but I liked it best as it used to be in my time, when you took a boat and rowed across from Mestre. It don't seem natural to come to Venice by railway."

Now they emerge upon a broad flight of water-washed steps, and there is a general rush towards the gondolas, of which a black fleet is drawn up, waiting for hire. And now, from 'amid a crowd of porters, gondoliers, and hotel-touters, there steps a smart sailor, who touches his broad-brimmed straw hat, puts a whistle to his lips, and blows a shrill note that rings high above all the din of voices.

Instantly, from the opposite side of the canal, there darts forward a trim long-boat manned by six rowers, who hoist their oars in salute when Donato comes down the steps.

"Round the Grand Canal," says he, handing La Giulietta to the cushioned seat in the stern.

So they take their places. Then the rowers bend

to their oars; the boatswain steers; the long-boat shoots out into the middle of the stream. And now, as they cleave their rapid way, the green water scintillating at every stroke, there is unfolded a wondrous panorama —a panorama of pillared palace-fronts inlaid with precious marbles; picturesque churches of old brown brick; and stately bell-towers, with pyramidal roofs clear cut against the blue. And there are huge posts before the palace doors, striped red and white, and green and blue, which cast their many-coloured reflections in the shifting waters. And there are gondolas moored to these posts; gondolas everywhere; gondolas crossing and re-crossing, going with the stream and against the stream. And there are pleasure-boats with gay awnings; barges laden with grain, and casks, and timber, and sand; market-boats piled high with pumpkins, melons, and green and golden gourds. Yonder, under a vine-trellis, sit a party of gondoliers drinking and smoking. Here comes an eight-oared pinnace full of white-coated officers. Now the boat glides past the mouth of a side canal, and they hear the wild cry of a coming gondolier—"Stalì! ah, Stalì!" Now they pass under the mighty arch of the Rialto, all iridiscent with reflected lights. This beautiful church is Santa Maria della Salute; that long building with columned portico looking to the lagune, is the Sea Custom-House. And yonder lies the island of Saint George; and that cloistered palace, flushed with rose and patterned with lace-work, and those opalescent domes beyond, and that solitary bell-tower standing alone, like a giant obelisk of channelled brickwork—these are the Ducal Palace, and the Cathedral and Campanile of St. Mark.

The girl holds fast by her uncle's hand. She says

nothing. She only looks, and is silent. As a child, she used to watch the clouds at sunset, fancying how the pale green heaven was a stainless sea flowing between islands of amethyst and gold, and picturing to herself how, beyond that sea and those islands, lay the Heavenly City with gates of jasper and pavements of pearl, from whose battlements her mother looked down and listened to her evening prayer. But what dream-city ever shone so fair as this, or looked so vision-like?

"Those are the Royal Gardens, where you see the trees," says Donato; "and that open space where two high columns are standing alone is the Piazza of St. Mark. That white arch spanning the water-way between the Ducal Palace and the next building (you see it high above the bridge across which people are passing), that is the Bridge of Sighs. And look! beyond that farthest point stretches the great sand-bank which they call the Lido; and the Lido divides us from the Adriatic Sea."

"But is not this the sea?" she asks, wonderingly.

"No, no, my little girl," interposes Uncle Stefano. "These are the Lagunes; salt-water shallows that rise and fall with the tide."

They are level now with the Sea Custom-House, beyond which rises a forest of masts.

"You see that big vessel yonder?" continues Donato. "That is the Austrian guardship. They fire a gun at sunset. And that great steamer with the white funnels is the English mail-steamer; and this is—the *Diamante*."

This? This three-masted vessel, all dressed with flags and streamers . . . this the *Diamante!*

They glide alongside of the shining black hull. A

rope is thrown and caught. The men ship their oars; the boatswain steadies the side of the boat against the foot of the accommodation-ladder; Donato jumps out, hands La Giulietta up the side, and as she sets her foot upon the deck, takes off his cap and bids her welcome with as much honour as if she were a queen.

The first and second mates, with gold bands to their caps and anchor buttons to their jackets, are standing by to receive them. They salute their Captain and take off their caps to his guests. The sailors have the name of the ship painted on the ribbon that goes round their hats. The decks are smooth as glass, and clean as new-fallen snow. The brass fittings of the wheel, and the binnacle, and the companion-way, shine like gold! Guns, too! Warlike, deadly-looking guns, mounted on gun-carriages; as if the *Diamante* were a ship of war!

"Does that surprise you?" says the Captain, with his grave smile. "A merchant vessel of this tonnage is bound to carry heavy ordnance. We need them for firing salutes; and sometimes even for self-defence. We might fall in with such folk as pirates, off Borneo and the coast of China; and then we should be glad enough of our guns."

"I thought you traded only between Bari and Venice," says Uncle Stefano, with a bewildered face.

"I never said that. Not but what we have sometimes shipped a cargo at Bari. But, for the most part, the *Diamante* trades farther afield. Our last trip was to the West India Islands."

Then he takes them round the decks, and La Giulietta, who has never seen anything in the way of a boat bigger than the pleasure-skiffs on the Adige,

has the compass explained to her, and the use of the steersman's wheel; and peeps down into the huge, dark, empty hold, not long since cleared of its cargo of indigo, coffee, and spices. Then a bell sounds, and they go down to luncheon.

A cabin, not large, indeed, but well lighted, with little mirrors let into the pannelled walls, and fittings of horsehair and mahogany, and a sofa-seat under the stern windows; a table glittering with glass and bright with flowers; a luncheon which is in truth a dinner, well cooked, well served; wines that froth when they are poured out, and forks made of silver and bigger than spoons!—such wonders as these hold the simple guests silent and awestruck. Donato takes the head of the table, and his first mate the foot; La Giulietta sits at her lover's right hand; her uncle at his left. The second mate does not appear. The steward waits, with a napkin under his arm. Little is done in the way of conversation; and that little is led by the Captain and respectfully seconded by the mate. La Giulietta, meanwhile, marvels how her uncle can find courage to eat in the midst of so much magnificence; for Stefano Beni, despite his amazement, is perfectly able to enjoy his dinner. The mate leaves the table when the cloth is removed; and the Captain and his guests are served with coffee. Then it is time to see something of the sights of Venice.

"First let me show you my counting-house and sleeping-berth," says Donato, opening a door that leads into two little cabins, the one giving upon the other.

The first, which he calls his "counting-house," is a tiny office in which he keeps his ledgers, log-book,

charts, correspondence, and so forth. The second, besides the ordinary berth-furniture, contains some three or four shelves of books, a telescope on brackets, and, arrayed upon the walls, some curious Oriental arms, a cutlass, a fowling-piece, and a brace of pistols. The books in their handsome bindings look so attractive, that Giulietta ventures, timidly, to take one from the shelf; but it proves to be in some foreign language, and she can make nothing of it. Replacing it, she takes down another. This time, not only the language but the very alphabet is unknown to her.

"You are fond of reading, carina?" asks her lover.

"I sometimes think I am too fond of it."

"Yes? And what reading do you like best—poetry and romances? Ah! I thought as much. Nay, my books will not please you."

She was looking now at a well-worn little volume, gilt edged and vellum bound.

"What is this?" she asked, shyly. "It is not Italian—it looks like a Missal."

"It is so far like a Missal, that it is in Latin. These are the Odes of Horace. Have you never heard of Horace? He was a poet, and a Roman—a Roman of the old Pagan time when Jove was worshipped and Christ was not yet come."

"That must have been before Romeo and Giulietta?"

"Ah; long before."

"And you can read it? Why, you are as learned as Padre Anselmo!"

"Who is Padre Anselmo?"

"He is the parish-priest of Montorio — a saint upon earth; and learned—oh! so learned! He knows

not only Latin, but Greek; and he has written a book."

"He must be a wonderful man," said Donato smiling. "But what will you say if I tell you that I have a friend at Bari, a Canon of the Cathedral, who knows Hebrew and Arabic as well as Latin and Greek; and who has written at least a dozen books, some of which are as big as those ledgers of mine you were looking at just now?"

The girl lifted her eyes to him in wonder. A Canon of the Cathedral! It was as if he had said that he was intimate with the Pope.

The wheelwright, meanwhile, was peering somewhat curiously at a small ebony case that hung near the cabin-door. It was a neatly made little case, like a tiny shrine, and it had folding doors mounted on silver hinges, and a silver key-hole. The whole thing, frame and all, did not measure more than eight inches by six.

"May one ask what this is?" he said.

Donato took a small silver key from his watch-chain, unlocked the case, and disclosed a couple of miniatures on a background of purple velvet. The one was a mere head—a boy's head, apparently—set cherub-like in a mist of clouds against a background of blue sky; the other represented a lady dressed in the short-waisted fashion so familiar to ourselves in portraits of the Princess Charlotte and her contemporaries.

The girl's colour changed.

"How beautiful!"

She said it, as it were, under her breath, and with a sinking heart. She dreaded to ask whose portraits

they were. Could it be that her lover had already been a husband and a father?

"My mother," said Donato, with tender seriousness.

The wheelwright pulled out his spectacles, wiped them carefully, and stared at the miniatures in respectful silence. La Giulietta's eyes filled with sudden tears.

"She was very beautiful. She died many, many years ago, when I was a lad."

"And this?" said old Stefano. "Is this your own portrait?"

Donato, a yet graver shade stealing over his features, shook his head.

"My younger brother," he said softly.

"He is living?"

But the girl, with a woman's quick sympathy, saw how it was, and answered for him.

"No, no," she said, hurriedly. "Don't ask—it pains him!"

Donato closed the ebony doors and turned the key in silence. Then he drew her to his side, and kissed her on the forehead.

"I have only you, dear," he said.

Five minutes later they were in a gondola, gliding across the shining waters and making for the landing-place in front of the Piazza of St. Mark. And then the rest of the afternoon went by in a wondrous dream —a dream of intricate canals crossed by innumerable bridges; of narrow streets crowded with foot-passengers; of churches all sculpture without, all golden gloom of mosaics and paintings within; of islands lying afar off in the warm blaze of the sinking sun; of gardens, and public squares, and music of military bands; of the

soft lapsing of green waters against marble steps; of a crimson sunset, and a magical twilight; of night and the stars, and the flying train again. And then home.

CHAPTER XII.

UNDER THE DARK ARCHWAY.

"I CAN hardly believe that it was not a dream!"

It was La Giulietta who spoke. Her uncle, tired after his day's work, had dropped asleep in his chair. The lovers were out upon the balcony, talking about Venice. It was a little after eight in the evening. The sky was dark overhead; and save some empty vetturas, the yard below was deserted. Old Anita, with her brazier and her three-legged stool, had cleared out long ago from under the archway; the business of the trattoria was over for the day; and only here and there between attic and basement was a lighted window to be seen; for already most of the lodgers in the Osteria del Cappello were gone to bed.

"Wait till you have seen Venice by moonlight," replied Donato; "then, indeed, you will say it must be a dream. What I like is to take a gondola and go about the side-canals at night, gliding silently out of darkness into light, and back again into darkness. Everything is ghostly. You round a corner, and something splashes into the water behind you—it seems as if a murder might have been done. You pass under a balcony, and hear voices in stealthy conversation; or under a lighted window, and listen to a woman singing within. Every house seems full of mystery — every gondola you meet seems to carry a secret."

"I don't think I should like it," said the girl. "I should be afraid."

"Not if I were with you, dear?"

"Ah, no—not with you."

"You would go anywhere, and feel safe anywhere, with me?"

"Anywhere!"

"There are so many places to which I should like to take you—ay, and to which I will take you, by and by. Beautiful islands where ferns grow to the size of trees, and palm-woods peopled with monkeys and parrots come down to the water's edge. Some of these are coral islands, built up from the bottom of the sea by myriads of tiny insects. Those are places in which winter is unknown. Then in summer we will steer northwards, to the coasts of Sweden and Norway, where you will see whales spouting in deep water, and seals sunning themselves on the sands. And at one place to which I will take you, you shall behold the sun shining at midnight. You can hardly believe that? Yet it is true."

"How much you know!" she said. "How much you have seen!"

"A sailor cannot help picking up scraps of knowledge by the way. We do not go to sea with our eyes shut."

"Ah, but you have education!"

"I can read and write, and keep my log and my ledgers."

The girl shook her head.

"You know Latin," she said, "and other foreign tongues printed in strange letters that I had never seen till I looked at your books the other day."

"What of that? I am a trader, and my business takes me to foreign ports where I should be badly off indeed if I could not make myself understood. Besides, like yourself, I am fond of reading; and at sea, with plenty of leisure, it would be hard if I could not manage to be learning something."

She listened; she sighed.

"It is not that," she said. "It is not what you have taught yourself, or what you have picked up. You are a scholar. Your—your mother was a lady. Nay, I am a poor, ignorant girl; but in this I cannot be deceived. I saw it in her portrait. She was not one of us—nor are you."

"You know me for what I am—a trader: a man of the people!"

"No; you are—a gentleman."

"And supposing I were a prince," he said, lightly; "what then?"

"I should be too far beneath you—as I am now."

"Why, Giulietta mia! Why, carina—what folly is this?"

He caught her in his arms; he kissed her eyes, and found them wet with tears.

"You are a silly child, he said. "If I were a King and you loved me, your love would make you my equal! But I am not a King. I am not even 'Romeo and a Montague.' I am simple Cesare Donato, who loves you with all his heart, and loves you for all his life. Listen, dearest—I am respectably born; rather more so, perhaps, than most men of my station. And you are right in believing that I have received a tolerably good education. But do you suppose that I want

a learned wife? Should I love you one jot better if you knew Latin?"

"No, but——"

"But what?"

"I fear you will love me less by and by, if—if you are ashamed of me."

"My Giulietta," said her lover, seriously, "you may be quite sure that I know my own mind, and that I shall never change. I am older than you by many years; some might say, perhaps, that I am too old and too grave for one so young as yourself—so young and so bright! But old as I am, you are my first love."

"Am I? Am I, indeed?"

"My first, dear; and my last. With me, it is once and for ever."

"Once and for ever!" she repeated, nestling closer within his arm.

"And never—never again—tell me that I could be ashamed of you. How could I be anything but proud of the woman I love? How could I love her, if I was not proud of her?"

"But I am only a poor girl," she whispered. "I have no knowledge—no manners. When your friends see me . . . ."

"I have no friends," he interrupted, quickly. "Or rather, I have but one—that one of whom I told you the other day. You need not be afraid of him; he is an old man, learned as one of the Fathers of the Church, and simple as a child."

"But you have relations?"

"Well, I have cousins; but I have not seen them for many years. You know how it is with relations. If one is brought up with them from childhood, the tie

is close and real; but when families are scattered and the young ones grow up apart, then relationship ceases to be a tie, and is forgotten. That is my case. Those distant relatives may be dead for aught I know—I should hardly remember them if I saw them; and I am sure they would not remember me."

"I have relations whom I have never even seen," said the girl; "my Aunt Francesca Petrucelli and her family. She lives near Naples, at a place called San Lorenzo. She is a widow, and has a farm of her own, and a family of three daughters and four sons. I should dearly like to see her, and my seven unknown cousins."

"I will take you there, carina, if you like, when we go for our wedding cruise. No—don't thank me. Whatever pleases you makes me happy."

"You must not indulge me too much," she said. "You will spoil me."

He passed his hand caressingly over her hair.

"I had always meant to take you to Naples and Sicily for that first trip, my darling. And I have been thinking, too, how we will make you comfortable on board the *Diamante*. I mean to shift my first mate to a berth amid-ships, and turn his present cabin into a sort of dressing-room and counting-house for myself. Then we will knock away the partition between my own two little cabins, and make a good state-room for you. Mind, I expect my little wife to be a good sailor! She will have to go round the world with me."

A vettura drawn by a white horse came jolting under the archway, and drew up in the middle of the yard. The girl had shrunk back at the first sound of

wheels; but seeing the old white horse, she was reassured and went on talking. 'Tonio Moretti's horses were both bays.

"How long would it take to go round the world?" she asked.

"In a sailing vessel?—impossible to tell. Much would depend on her length of stay in foreign ports, and still more on wind and weather. However, I don't propose that we shall literally circumnavigate the globe, carina; but only that you shall make many a voyage with me in the *Diamante*."

"But what would become of Uncle Stefano?"

"He can come too, if he likes. We have accommodation enough and to spare."

"As if Uncle Stefano would go to sea! Yet how lonely he would be here in Verona!"

"Why need he stay in Verona? He has worked long enough. It is time he took life more easily. What if he came to Bari? I have a house there, you know, and a bit of land. I have let the land, hitherto; and as for the house, I have only lived in it for a few weeks at a time, twice or thrice in the year. Now I am going to furnish it, and make it pretty for you; and if your uncle would live with us and farm the land for me, I would take it back into my own hands. How would that be, think you?"

She thought, of course, that nothing could be better. It was but the other day that he said how he would fain sit in the shade of his own vine, and eat polenta of his own growing; and would not this be almost the same thing?

The vetturino in the yard, meanwhile, had taken his horse out of the traces, and led him into the stable.

And now they could hear the other horses whinnying a welcome to their comrade, and the vetturino whistling and moving to and fro. In the street outside, all was as quiet as at midnight.

"Tell me about your house at Bari," she said, her cheek resting against his shoulder. "Is it an old house? Were you born there?"

"It is a little white house, carina; neither very new nor very old; and I certainly was not born there, for I bought it only two or three years ago. It was just a sailor's fancy; for when a man is knocking about the ocean, he likes to know that there is a rood or so of dry land all his own, on which he can set foot when he comes ashore. Well, the house stands high, on a terrace looking to the sea. It has a pergola in front; and on the terrace there grows a palm-tree—a real African palm. The hill-side is covered with vines and olive-gardens; and down below, on a jutting promontory, washed on three sides by the bluest sea in the world, lies the great white town, with its castle, and its cathedral, and its harbour full of shipping."

"It must be as beautiful as Venice!"

"Ah, no—there is but one Venice. Yet——"

"Yet what?"

He leaned over the balcony, and looked round the yard.

"I fancied I heard a sound underneath," he said; "as if some one was listening."

"Perhaps it was Monna Teresa shaking out her cloth after supper. Her balcony is just below ours."

"Very likely. At all events, she is not there now."

"And you were saying——"

"Well, I was saying that Bari is not like Venice.

But it is a bright and busy place, in a land of sunshine and plenty; and I think your Uncle Stefano, smoking his pipe at sunset in that little pergola——"

"What about me?" asks the wheelwright, from within, waking with a start.

"A plot, little uncle!"

"A plot to starve me, eh? Do you know what o'clock it is, my little girl? Twenty minutes past nine, and no supper ready!"

So La Giulietta hurries in to spread the table; and presently they are all sitting together at their evening meal—a meal literally of Attic simplicity, consisting of bread, salad, salted olives, a kind of sweet cake made with chestnut flour, and a measure of country wine in a wicker-flask. For Cesare Donato is now become as one of themselves, and partakes their ordinary fare.

While at supper, he leads back to the subject of Bari. To-morrow he must go to Venice, to ship part of his cargo; thence to Trieste, and from Trieste to Smyrna; touching at Bari by the way, in order to set a builder to work upon the repairing of his house. He will be gone not less than a month—possibly as long as five weeks. In the meanwhile (assuming, as a matter of course, that they are to live together as one family) the question to be settled is, whether Uncle Stefano will undertake to farm the land?

To this, the wheelwright, though inwardly flattered, replies with a string of objections. He has lived all his days in Verona, and is too old to be pulled up by the roots. He has no mind, at his age, to live under another man's roof. Besides, what should a fellow who has been making wheels all his life, understand about farming?

"How much land have you?" he asks, presently.

"Very little—about sixty acres, planted with olives and almonds."

"You call that 'very little,' do you? I call it a great deal. And as for growing olives and almonds, I know as much about that work as you know about fitting spokes to a nave. No, thank you! I'll neither spoil your crops, nor make a fool of myself. But I'll tell you what I will do, if you will like it. Find me some little place near by—anything with four walls and a roof, and half a dozen acres of land that I could till with my own two hands—and I'll end my days there and be content."

"I will build you a house, and let you six acres of my own land," said Donato.

But the old man would hear of no compromise. His mind was made up. He would not hire; he would buy. To own "a bit of land," to cultivate it himself, to eat "polenta of his own growing," had been the patient ambition of his life, and he would not be baulked of it. The Italian peasant nature, the deeply-rooted love of the soil for the soil's sake, was strong within him.

"Find me that," he said, "and I shall be happier than a king; and it will be for your children, when I die."

So Donato promised to find it, and the thing was settled.

The lovers were long saying their last words that night in the passage. They would not meet again for many weeks; and it was their first parting.

"It is a foolish thing to ask," said Donato; "but I want you, dear, to give me something that you have

touched, or worn. A glove, a flower—anything—no matter what!"

She left him for a moment, and came back with a book in her hand.

"It is old and worthless," she said; "but it was my mother's. And there is not a page of it that I have not read a hundred times over."

It was a thin volume in a parchment cover, dog-eared, and broken, and yellow with age. It had once had a clasp. The rivet-holes were there; but the clasp was gone.

He glanced at the title-page.

"You call this worthless? Why it is Luigi da Porto's 'History of Two Noble Lovers,'—the rare original edition of Romeo and Giulietta! You must not give me this—it is too valuable."

"If it is valuable, so much the better," she replied, simply. "I give it to you because it is precious to me—and I love you."

He kissed the book, and put it in the breast-pocket of his pilot-coat.

"Then I accept it. And what shall I give you?"

"That silver ring upon your finger."

"This? It is too rough and ugly, and has too sad a history. It belonged to an Abyssinian slave; and it was sold to me by his owner, in the slave-market at Alexandria. Besides, I will not give you a ring, till I put the wedding-ring on your finger."

"Why so? I know two girls who are betrothed; and their lovers have each given them a ring."

"Well, sailors are superstitious; and I should look upon it as a bad omen. No, my darling—I cannot give you a ring; but I will bring you a bracelet from

Smyrna. In the meanwhile, take this little seal. I have worn it for years on my watch-chain; and see—it is engraved with a dog's head. That means 'Fidelity.'"

"I will put it on a ribbon, and wear it day and night till you come back."

He took both her hands in his.

"I will write to you to-morrow evening from Venice," he said. "And remember, I shall look for letters at every port—Trieste, Bari, Smyrna."

"Che! che! Don't be out there all night, saying good-bye!" shouted the wheelwright, testily.

"He is right. The longer one lingers, the harder it is to part! God bless you, my darling."

"I cannot bear you to go," she said, clinging to him.

"And I cannot bear to leave you!"

He folded her in his arms; he kissed her with many kisses.

"My Giulietta, good-bye."

"No, no—not yet—a minute longer, my love!—my Romeo!"

He kissed her once again—put her from him—shut the door quickly, and was gone!

For a moment, she stood listening to the rapid ring of his footfall growing fainter down the stairs; then crept away to her own little room; cowered down in the dark, and wept silently.

It was a wide, stone staircase, dimly lighted here and there. Donato ran down quickly. But there was an unaccustomed lump in his throat that made him stop for a moment at the bottom and draw a deep breath.

"Poor little thing!"

He brushed his hand across his eyes. Manlike, he was impatient of his pain, and half ashamed of it. So he told himself that he was pitying his little Giulietta, while in truth he was pitying Cesare Donato.

Then he took out a cigarette, and crossed the court-yard; intending to borrow a light from the Madonna, before whose shrine a feeble wick was burning. Now beside the little lamp there stood a broken tumbler containing a handful of faded flowers; and these flowers caught his eye, just as he was about to touch the flame with the end of his cigarette. He recognized some of the orchids and edelweiss that he had sent her nearly a fortnight ago. And this was what she had done. Poor child!

Touched by the artless piety of the little offering, he put back his cigarette. To light it so would be sacrilege in her eyes; and, though he smiled at his own weakness, he forebore for her sake. Then he looked up at her balcony; but old Stefano was already gone to his room, and in the window there was no light. All the house was dark. The empty vetturas stood in the middle of the yard; the osteria was shut up; the stable-door was locked for the night.

To linger was idle; so, buttoning his coat over the old book she had given him, he turned towards the street.

It was dark in the yard, and darker still under the archway. Yet amid that depth of blackness, the sea-man's keen sight seemed to detect something—some-thing that was not mere shadow. Was it a projection of the masonry? Was it a man standing up flat against the wall?

Whistling carelessly, but keeping his eye upon this

unknown object, he went on unhesitatingly. That instant the figure sprang upon him, grappled with him in deadly silence, and rolled with him on the ground.

CHAPTER XIII.

CHRISTMAS EVE IN BAVARIA.

A CHRISTMAS meeting at Pastor Kreutzmann's—so homely, so hearty, so hospitable—more resembled a clan-gathering in some Tyrolean farmstead than an evening party within the charmed circle of Munich society. For Munich society—governed by a Draconian law of etiquette, and stultified by the religious observance of a code of infinitely minute formalities—was at that time one of the most artificial in Europe. It oscillated between the extremes of servility and insolence; and it reproduced, at all events in its three or four uppermost strata, the stilted absurdities of Versailles two hundred years before. Bred under a despotism of precedence, and educated in an atmosphere of petty ceremonial, the upper-class Bavarian of that mimic Court was as learned in matters of genealogy as the Gotha Almanack, and as skilled in the art of bowing as Sir Pertinax Macsycophant. He spent his life in the feverish pursuit of a decoration, a promotion, or a place; and if half a century of toadyism chanced to be at last rewarded with the office of Deputy-Assistant-Court-Boot-jack-in-Waiting, he was forthwith translated to the seventh heaven of gratified ambition, and died content.

It need scarcely be said that a society composed

of Deputy-Assistant-Court-Boot-jacks-in-Waiting, their patrons, clients, wives, families, and friends—a society built up circle above circle, clique within clique, each duller, stiffer, more purgatorial than the one next below it—was not only the most artificial but the most portentously exclusive that our century has beheld. A stranger armed with a diplomatic introduction—above all, a stranger with a title—could obtain admission to its dismal coteries without much difficulty. Lancelot Lord Brackenbury, for instance, might have spent his Christmas Eve in any of the most jealously-guarded saloons of Munich—nay, at the Royal Palace itself, had he been so minded; but to a "Von"-less Bavarian gentleman, no matter how well educated or well mannered, the social platform one step above his own was as hopelessly inaccessible as Mecca to a Giaour. As for the simple Kreutzmann family, they were as much beyond the pale of what was called "society" as if they belonged to some savage tribe unweaned from flint implements and bone carvings.

Yet the Kreutzmanns themselves, in common with the honest Baïrische middle-class to which they belonged, believed quite innocently and devoutly in the sublime infallibility of all these little Chamberlains, Marshals, Gold Sticks, High Stewards, Equerries, and other Court functionaries who revolved at such an immeasurable distance above their heads. To them a Deputy-Assistant-Court-Bootjack-in-Waiting was invested with almost superhuman dignity; while the King and the ex-King, the Queen, the Princes, the Princesses, and all the Royal and Serene Highnesses of the family, down to their august seventy-times-seventh cousins thrice removed, were godlike beings of whom it would

be treason to suppose that they were compounded of merely mortal clay, or liable to such cracks and breakages as plebeian pottery is heir to.

And now Frau Kreutzmann's Christmas gathering was actually graced by the presence of a real, live English "Herr Baron," as godlike, as gifted, as superior to humanity in general, as any native luminary whose titles were to be found in the Bavarian Court Guide. Surely the good soul would have been more than mortal, if she had not felt a flutter of honest pride when that same Herr Baron led her niece Kätchen out for the first waltz, and engaged the hand of Brenda for the second!

"You see him? He who danced just now with our Kätchen—that is the Herr Baron. He lodges at the Hotel Maulick. He is betrothed to Fräulein Winifred. That is she—that fair maiden sitting yonder in the corner of the room. She does not dance to-night—she is in too deep mourning. She only looks on. Beautiful?—I should think so, indeed! Beautiful and gentle as an angel! She is living with us for the winter—about to study in Herr Krüger's atelier. She is an orphan, and has lately lost her last blood relation—a dear, sweet child! Already she is like one of ourselves. I don't know what we shall do when it comes to parting from her—Kätchen and Brenda will break their hearts. For how long, do you ask? Ah! that I cannot say. A year was talked about; but who knows? Perhaps they will marry before then. They will make a beautiful couple. And noble—the noblest of the noble! 'Tis said he owns estates as big as all Suabia!"

Repeating the same little story in almost the same words, Frau Kreutzmann went round among her guests;

whereupon each plump Frau in succession held up her hands, opened her eyes as wide as possible, and (varying the ejaculation more or less profanely) exclaimed:—

"Ach, Himmel! You don't say so, Cousin Lisbeth! —A Herr Baron! And what is his most high lordship's name and title?"

To which Frau Kreutzmann, with as near an approach to the English as her tongue could frame, replied:—

"The Herr Baron, Lord Brankenburg."

The younger guests were even more interested and more inquisitive than the elder. The girls gathered round Kätchen and Brenda, asked innumerable questions, and listened open-mouthed to all that was told them. Had the Herr Baron a castle in England? Why was he not in uniform? Why did he wear no ribbons or decorations? Was the beautiful Fräulein also noble? Had she "the florins"? Was she fond of him? Did he adore her? When were they to be married? Most interesting of all was the fact that these illustrious strangers were but just engaged.

"It is a romance!" sighed a stout damsel, whose two long plaits of magnificent flaxen hair hung down her back, tied with blue ribbons. "But will there be no betrothal-feast? No cards? No announcement in the Court *Zeitung*?"

To which Kätchen and Brenda replied that the Herr Baron and Fräulein Winifred wished their engagement to be as private as possible; that, in fact, the Herr Baron was going back to England at the end of the week.

It was strictly a family party, and consisted of rela-

tions only. There was the Pastor's only brother, who kept a school at Weilheim; and there were Frau Kreutzmann's three married sisters with their husbands and families; to say nothing of half-a-dozen maiden aunts, besides nephews, nieces, and cousins innumerable. Most of these good folk were farmers from the neighbourhood of Partenkirchen and the Walchensee; one or two were timber merchants; but the most important personage of the family was a certain great-uncle, who was a brewer and burgomaster of Starnberg, and who was reputed to be worth a hundred thousand florins. In short, there must have been nearly a hundred guests assembled that evening under Pastor Kreutzmann's roof.

The elder women, with scarcely an exception, wore gowns of rich black silk or satin, with sleeves puffed at the top and narrow at the wrists, little shawls of coloured silk or lace, and caps and aprons trimmed with old yellow blonde; while two very old ladies, who came all the way from the borders of the Bavarian Forest, appeared in turban-like head-dresses of dark moleskin. One or two of the younger damsels who lived in the town and aspired to be fashionable, were dressed in white muslin trimmed with gay ribbons; but the rest, like Kätchen and Brenda, wore the picturesque short skirt and embroidered cap which now only survives in rural districts, and, like most national costumes, is rapidly becoming a thing of the past.

The guests amused themselves after the manner of middle-class Germans in general and Bavarians in particular. That is to say, the elder men congregated in a room apart, smoking and beer-drinking. The young people danced in the best parlour, which was

cleared for the occasion; and the married women sat round and looked on. A couple of violins, two clarionets and a flute, made excellent music in the passage outside; while every now and then, between the waltzes, a part-song would be sung by four or eight voices, or some skilled performer would "oblige the company" with a solo on the zither.

A nation that dines at mid-day, goes to the theatre at four, and comes home to supper at eight, issues its invitations naturally enough for evening parties at five. Frau Kreutzmann's guests all arrived at that primitive hour. The business of the evening was inaugurated with coffee, cakes, and beer; dancing began a little before six; and because on Christmas Eve late hours were excusable, the supper was put off till ten. But the great event of the evening, after all, was Frau Kreutzmann's Christmas-Tree—that Christmas-Tree which for the last three days had been locked up in a room by itself, unseen by any eyes save those of Kätchen and Brenda, who were deputed to decorate it. This Christmas-Tree was the good Frau's invariable *coup de théâtre;* and her guests knew perfectly well that it was sure to be forthcoming. Nevertheless, it was *de rigueur* to affect entire ignorance of the impending event.

"We have a little surprise in store for you, by and by," says Frau Kreutzmann, first to one and then to another. "Aha! you will see! Wait till half-an-hour before supper—you will see!"

Whereupon the nephew or cousin so addressed puts on a puzzled face, and professes all the wonder proper to the occasion.

In the meanwhile, dancing went on apace; each

waltz ending in Bavarian fashion with a thunderous stamp, sometimes accompanied by a loud "Hah!" in which all the performers united. The Herr Baron, having done his devoir by his host's two nieces, retired from the field, and became a spectator for the rest of the evening. It may be that he found these solid Bavarian damsels more interesting from an artistic point of view, than light in hand to dance with.

"Does this amuse you?" he asked, standing beside Winifred's chair.

The couples were just pairing off for something like the eleventh waltz of the evening.

"Very much. They dance so well; and the music is charming."

"Doesn't it make you wish to take a turn also?"

"I?" she said, smiling. "I, who never learned to dance—who have never seen dancing till to-night? You forget what a barbarian I am."

"Put it the other way, and say that I forgot you were so highly civilised. What is dancing, but a survival of barbarism—like tattooing, or the wearing of earrings? Nay, I mean it. You should see how they waltz at some of these village festivals up in the mountain valleys!"

"It must be very picturesque."

"Picturesque?—well, they spin round for hours together, like teetotums; and when they get tired of spinning, they extemporise the most amazing variations on the original figure. Sometimes the women will gather in a knot in the centre, linking arms and stamping, while the men leap and slap their thighs; sometimes the men go to the centre, while the women hop round on one leg! It is as wild a piece of savagery

as any Maori war-dance. For my own part, I believe that all these popular dances are of remote antiquity. The Albanian Greeks have a sword and musket-dance which is undoubtedly a survival of the Pyrrhic dance. The Spanish Cachuca came from ancient Egypt, castanets and all. And as for the Neapolitan Tarantella and Saltarella, you have but to come with me to-morrow morning to the Etruscan vase-rooms at the old Pinacotheka to see them depicted as they were danced in Latium and Campania two thousand years ago."

"And that is what you call a survival of barbarism!" said Winifred, indignantly. "Now, to my thinking, it is we who are barbarians and degenerate. If I were an Albanian girl, how proud I should be to see my brother or my lover dance that Pyrrhic dance!"

"Would you not rather go into a corner, and weep for the glory that had become a mere tradition? Would you not ask:—

'Where is the Pyrrhic Phalanx gone?'

Give me rather our Neapolitan Saltarella—a classic survival, if you like; but with nothing of fallen heroism about it."

"What is it, then? What is it like?"

"It is a remnant of the old Bacchic jollities; and the dance, as I said a moment ago, is just like the wild groups on the painted vases—all wooing and rejecting, flying and pursuing. There is one figure in which the men pair off two and two, hooking their left legs one in the other, and hopping back to back; their partners meanwhile beating their tambourines, and springing into the air like wild Bacchantes."

"I should like to see that!"

"I have seen it hundreds of times when I was a boy. We had a villa, you know, at Castellamare, where we spent our winters; and whenever there was a popular festa, some half-a-dozen couples of young men and girls—our own boatmen and their sweethearts generally—would come in costume, and dance for us in the hall. It was a scene worth painting—my father and mother sitting apart, in two antique carved chairs; the servants peeping over the balustrades of the great staircase; four or five tall, bare-footed fishermen in scarlet woollen caps, standing round with lighted torches; and in the centre of the marble floor, the dancers whirling to the music of a couple of mandolines. How plainly I see it! How plainly I see the house and all its surroundings—the loggia where my mother sat on sunny afternoons—the orange-walk Cuthbert used to carry me to and fro, when I was a tiny little fellow—the old-fashioned garden, terrace below terrace, with beds laid out in heraldic patterns, where you looked down upon the family coat-of-arms emblazoned in living flowers!"

"It must have been a beautiful place," said Winifred. "What has become of it?"

"I have no idea. It was sold after my mother's death, and I have never been near it since."

"Would you mind taking me to see it some day, Lancelot?" she asked, hesitatingly.

A troubled look came into his face.

"I hardly know," he said. "In one way it would be a sad sort of pleasure; but . . . . ."

"But the pain would be greater than the pleasure! I ought to have known that—I ought not to have asked you! Forget that I said it, Lancelot."

Their talk had become so earnest that they forgot all about the waltzers and the scene before their eyes. Now, however, they became aware of a general movement in the direction of the door.

It was half-past nine o'clock, and the great event of the evening was about to come off.

"Dear Fräulein Winifred," whispered Frau Kreutzmann, with a beaming countenance, "will his Excellency the Herr Baron condescend to come and see our Christmas Tree?"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE KEY OF THE BLUE CLOSET.

It was a Christmas Tree to be proud of. So everyone said; and so, with modest pride, Frau Kreutzmann told herself, when her guests stood round applauding. It rose ten feet above the tub in which it was planted—a well-grown, sturdy sapling, whose wide-spreading boughs were gay from top to bottom with ribbons, and gifts, and lighted tapers. Never was seen a Christmas Tree so rich in pretty things. Here were presents suited to the needs and tastes of both sexes and of all ages, each labelled with the name of the person for whom it was destined—purses, pipes, cigar-cases, needle-cases, pencil-cases, penknives, work-baskets, hymn-books, carved toys from Ober-Ammergau; staghorn brooches from the Black Forest; embroidered braces, slippers, and Bavarian caps; pen-holders, seals, paper-knives; beermugs of painted porcelain and Bavarian glass; dolls and tops

for such as had children at home; match-boxes, snuff-boxes, musical-boxes; gloves, neckties, ribbons; and even such useful commonplaces as pocket-handkerchiefs and stockings! In short, there was not only a gift for every guest, but there were even gifts for many not actually present.

Great was the hand-clapping, joyous were the exclamations, round about that Christmas Tree. It was "*Schöne!*" It was "*Wunderschöne!*" It was "*Unerhört!*" Were ever gifts so well chosen! How useful! How pretty! What a sackful of florins it must all have cost! Whose name is that on yonder silver spectacle-case? Pastor Kreutzmann's—and from the Herr Baron, too—real silver, and engraved with a cypher! And those beautiful necklaces of amber and ivory, are they also from the Herr Baron, and do they bear the names of Kätchen and Brenda? *Ach, Himmel!* What it is to have a milord for one's friend! And see!—that big Bible with the gilt clasp . . . . that is also for the good Pastor, from his nieces. The ebony snuff-box inlaid with mother-of-pearl, is for the great-uncle—he who is brewer and burgomaster at Starnberg. This powder-flask is for Rudolf Schwerin, who won the first prize at the shooting-match last autumn; Annchen Braun, who is going to be married, has a cuckoo-clock; and the two old ladies from the Bavarian Forest are provided with warm mittens and slippers for winter wear.

But of all the treasures that adorned that Christmas Tree, there was not one that attracted so much curiosity as a key that hung on the very topmost twig, out of the reach of the tallest. It was a large, ordinary-looking key, with a paper tied to the handle.

What key was it? What would it open? For whom was it intended? These were questions that no one seemed able to answer. At last, one youth bolder than the rest, ventured to ask Frau Kreutzmann for what purpose the key was placed there.

Kätchen and Brenda looked at each other and smiled. Frau Kreutzmann rubbed her hands, and nodded mysteriously.

"The key? So!—if anyone is curious about the key," said she, "let him take it down, and see what is written on the label."

Thus empowered, the youth fetched an alpenstock with a chamois-horn tip, and hooked the key off in triumph. A dozen hands were immediately held up.

"*Nein, nein*," said he, "I have taken it down, and I will be the first to read it."

Still mounted on his chair, he unfolded the label, turned it this way and that, looked blank, and tossed it to the nearest bystander.

"Make what you can of it!" said he. "It's Greek to me."

"What is it? Latin—French—English?"

"Let me look at it!"

"Ask Uncle Kreutzmann!"

"I think it is in English—and that it is for Fräulein Winifred," said the Pastor.

And so it was. A common iron key, not without a touch of rust on the handle—a key some three or four inches long, and addressed in Lancelot's handwriting:—"*To Miss Savage, for what it may be worth.*"

"For me?—'*for what it may be worth!*' What

does it mean?" she asked, confusedly; for all eyes were turned upon her.

"I promised you a Christmas-box," said Lancelot; "and here it is."

"But what am I to do with it? Does it open anything?"

"It is the key of the Blue Closet."

"The Blue Closet?"

"Which, unlike Bluebeard, I give you leave to open."

"I am very grateful; but where is the Blue Closet, and what am I to do with your six headless wives, when I have opened it?"

"They are yours to deal with as you may think fit. You may sketch them, model them, annihilate them, or bury them. You have but to find the door, turn the key, and take possession."

Smiling and puzzled, Winifred looked from one to another. There was some playful mystery here, and the Kreutzmanns were in the secret.

"Kätchen will tell me!" she said.

But Kätchen refused, and no one would enlighten her. She must search the castle, find the Blue Closet, and solve the riddle for herself.

Supper being announced, there was now a rush to the dining-room, where a mighty meal was provided. For though wont themselves to fare with primitive simplicity, the Kreutzmanns knew when and how to be profusely hospitable. At Christmas-time especially, when the good Pastor's kinsfolk were met beneath his roof and the poor thronged about his door, it might with truth be said that—

"It snewèd in hys house of meate and drinke."

And now, if the feast was Homeric in its plenty, the appetites of the revellers were no less heroic. Mountains of cold veal and sliced voorst perished at the first onslaught; Westphalia hams melted like snow before the sun; cakes of marvellous device vanished like the baseless fabric of a vision; and Baïrische beer flowed as freely as metheglin in the halls of Odin.

At length, when young and old had alike performed prodigies of valour, the party broke up; those who lived in Munich and its environs dispersing to their homes, while those who came from afar off were accommodated, some with beds in the house, and others with lodgings in the town.

Having shown her guests to their several quarters, Frau Kreutzmann prepared to see Winifred up to her room. This was a little act of kindly attention which she and her nieces performed every night as invariably as the clock struck ten. To-night, however, late as it was, they lingered at the foot of the stairs, as if there was something yet to be done.

"Are you too tired to go in search of the Blue Closet, *liebe* Winifred?" said Brenda.

"You would have me believe that there is a Blue Closet?"

"Can you doubt it?" said Frau Kreutzmann. "You have the key."

"Which opens nothing!"

But the girls protested that the key was actually the key of the Blue Closet; so, humouring what seemed to her a somewhat pointless jest, Winifred suffered herself to be conducted from corridor to cor-

ridor, from door to door, always trying the key, and always trying it in vain.

At length their round brought them to Winifred's own door; and Winifred's own door, it will be remembered, was last but one at the extreme end of the upper corridor. Here then her quest must terminate.

"So there is no Blue Closet, after all!"

"Nay, dear child, you must persevere till you find it!" said Frau Kreutzmann.

"But neither Christine's room nor my own is a Blue Closet; and the end room is empty. How can I persevere further, unless by going out upon the roof?"

"Brave heart holds fast to the last; faint heart fails on the threshold," said Kätchen, quoting a Bavarian proverb.

"Why not try the end room?" said Brenda.

"Ah!—it is the end room?"

She was tired; perhaps a little weary of the fruitless jest; but something in Brenda's look and tone roused her curiosity.

The door of the end room was locked. She listened; but all was silent within. Then she tried the key; and for the first time, lock and key fitted.

"Some one is inside!" she said, drawing back quickly.

"No one, dear child."

"But I see a light!"

"What of that? Nay, go in—fear nothing!"

Fear! Did Frau Kreutzmann suppose that she was afraid? Granted that her heart was beating a trifle quicker, it was with anticipation—not fear.

She smiled, turned the handle, and went in.

The empty room was an empty room no longer. It was a sculptor's studio and a lady's boudoir in one. There were flowers in the windows, engravings on the walls, warm rugs on the floor; in one corner a stove, a piano, and a writing-table; yonder a couch for rest —an easel for work—casts to draw from— books for study.

"Well, my child—well, dear Fräulein," said Frau Kreutzmann, delightedly. "What say you to the Herr Baron's Christmas present? What do you think of your Blue Closet?"

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE ENGLISCHER GARTEN.

"By heaven! I don't know how I am to wrench myself away. And yet, when the hour comes, I suppose I shall take my ticket and my seat, apologise to my opposite neighbour for the length of my legs, and look out of the window when the train moves off, with a face as stolid as if I was not leaving half my life and all my hopes on the banks of the Isar!"

"Whilst I, being only a woman, may lock myself into my room and cry my eyes out. That is, at all events, one of our few privileges—we can howl without disgrace."

They were rambling in the Englischer Garten, beyond which, on the other side of the river, the Kreutzmanns lived. Having had their portraits taken the other day by a Munich daguerreotypist, they had this morning fetched the miniatures from his studio;

two of those exquisitely delicate and tenderly tinted heads on silvered plates which we all, with so much justice, admired for a few years, while they were in fashion. And now, although it was midday and Winifred was due at the pastor's dinner-table, the lovers still went lingeringly to and fro under the big trees whose barren boughs, clear cut against the sunshine, marbled the path with shadows.

For Lancelot was going back to England by the evening mail; and this was their last walk together.

They had the place to themselves, too; for it was universal "Mittagsessen" in Munich; and streets, and squares, and parks were all deserted. There was no one to observe them; no one to listen to them. They could ramble and talk as they pleased—such disjointed, delicious talk as lovers are wont to indulge in; all retrospect and project, all castle-building and dream-weaving, interspersed with "Do you remember?" and "Did you suspect?" and "Shall you ever forget?"

"I can't say that I have ever yet arrived at howling-point," said Lancelot, replying to Winifred's exposition of the privileges of her sex; "but I know I felt bad enough that day when I left you sitting in the porch, and knew I should not see you again for a week. You remember how I lingered? I could not bear to say 'Good-bye.' My heart was filled with an immense tenderness and pity for you. I longed to take you in my arms; to tell you how I would try to make up to you for all you had lost. Yet I dared not. Your sorrow seemed to stand between us. But I took your hand, dearest——Do you remember? I took your hand; and while I held it, I said to you silently, but with such intensity of purpose that I could actually

hear the words in my mind!—'*I love you—I love you —I love you!*' I wanted to make you feel what I was saying. If you had looked at me, you would have known it all; but you never lifted your eyes. You did not even say, 'Good-bye!'"

"I tried; but the words would not come."

"Did the week seem long to you? It seemed like a month to me. Ah, if you had known with what a heavy heart I turned away!"

"You thought I did not care?"

"By Jove! I didn't know what to think. You let me go without a look—without a word!"

"But I waited in the porch—thinking you would come back."

"Had I known that, I would have come back, though I had got half way to Munich."

"But you rode away; and I listened till the last echo of your horse's hoofs died in the distance. How lonely I felt when I could hear them no longer!"

"And now you will be lonely again, when I am gone."

"Lonely—yes; but it will not be the loneliness of desolation, as that was. You will write to me, and I shall write to you. There will always be a letter to receive or to answer. And the Kreutzmanns will be very good to me; and, above all, I shall have occupation! You don't know how hard I mean to work, or how I will strive to make the most of Herr Krüger's teaching. I shall want you to praise my progress when you come back at Easter."

"But, my dear love, how shall I judge of your progress? You forget that you have never allowed me to see a single sketch."

"How could I show my feeble attempts to a great artist like you?"

Now when Winifred called him a "great artist," Lancelot, as if by way of protest, drew her hand through his arm, and there held it, caressingly.

"Ah, no!" he said. "I am not a great artist. I shall never be a great artist—now."

She looked up enquiringly. The momentary shade of hesitation, of regret, caught her ear at once.

"Why '*now*'?" she said. "What do you mean by '*now*'?"

"I mean that the conditions of my life are changed, and changed in a way that is fatal to my prospects as a painter. Art tolerates no divided duty. A man must give his whole soul to it—his whole time—his whole powers of observation, of memory, of comparison, of study. Even so, the thing he does must always fall short of the thing he had hoped to do. The greatest painters who ever lived, spent their lives, we may be certain, in the vain pursuit of an unattainable ideal. But, at all events, they did so spend their lives. They worked at least as hard as if they had been masons, or plumbers, or joiners. Now, my chances of doing such fair and honest work are over. I am no longer free. I have other duties—duties dry and distasteful enough for the most part; but they are duties, and I cannot escape from them."

"What sort of duties? And why need they interfere with your art that you so dearly love? Do you mean your Parliamentary duties? Surely there are Lords enough at Westminster to pass bills and make speeches, without you?"

"I don't mean my Parliamentary duties," he said,

smiling; "though they must, of course, count for something. I mean my duties as a landlord. There is a world of work of one sort and another involved in the management of a large estate; and, in my case, owing to the peculiar circumstances of the last four years, the work falls just so much the heavier. You have no idea of the arrears of business I shall have to wade through when I get back to England."

"But when that wading is done and over, you will be free to take up your own work again?"

"I shall never be free, my darling, as I was before," said Lancelot, with a sigh. "How is it possible? Look at the tenants—could I leave their interests in the hands of stewards and lawyers? I must do as Cuthbert would have done—and what I know he intended to do. There is his pet project of reclaiming the Danebury Marshes; that will be the work of years. Above all, there are those wretched 'dark-folk,' who need reclaiming more than the Marshes!"

"You will never succeed in civilizing the 'dark-folk.'"

"I mean to try, anyhow. Think of what they are—a predatory horde, as ignorant as savages; as lawless as banditti. How can I harbour such a godless lot, and not try to make them better? If ever a plain duty stared me in the face, Winifred, it is this."

And then he went on to tell her of the things he purposed doing. On a certain part of the moor, where springs were abundant and the soil was less barren than elsewhere, he meant to found a new colony. This colony—it would be too widely scattered to be called a village—would consist of a number of detached cottages, dotted here and there over the space of about

two square miles; each with its bit of garden-ground, and all within easy distance of a small church and school-house. The cottages once built, he meant to pull down all the old cabins, so compelling his "dark-folk" to settle into something like a community. This done, it would be comparatively easy to draw their children to the school-house; and though the parents would probably be irreclaimable to the last, the young ones would, at all events, grow up in habits of decency and order. Thus a new condition of things would gradually be established, and, in the course of another generation or two, the vagabond traditions of the race would be forgotten.

"You and I may not live to see it, Winifred," said Lancelot; "but our grandchildren will surely do so."

"It is a good work," said the girl, warmly. "I would not have you leave it undone for all the world!"

"And then I have thought that the church and school-house might stand there, dear, in remembrance. . . ."

His voice faltered.

"In remembrance of—Cuthbert?"

"Ay; in remembrance of Cuthbert. I have sketched a design for the buildings, and I have sent it to an architect for correction. It will be an out-of-the-way spot to live in; but there will be real work to do, and an earnest man—such a man as your friend, Mr. Penne-feather, for instance—would not think his life ill-spent in doing it."

Winifred looked up eagerly, as if about to speak; but checked herself, and waited.

"It seems premature to talk of giving away the living before the church is built," said Lancelot; "but I think you would perhaps like me to offer it to Mr. Pennefeather?"

"Oh, Lancelot! it is what I would have asked, if I had dared."

"I can afford to make it worth his acceptance. I mean, in fact, to devote the revenue of the past four years to these matters. The money has been accumulating in Marrables' hands, and I, of course, have not touched a penny of it. It makes a big sum altogether—more than enough to drain the marshes, build the new colony, and endow the living. I suppose the Pennefeathers would think themselves passing rich with a snug vicarage, a dozen acres of glebe, and four or five hundred a year?"

Winifred could hardly speak for joy. That her lover should serve her friends was even sweeter to her than if she could have served them herself. How happy they would be, and how happy it made her to think of their happiness! Already, in her mind's eye, she saw the good husband and wife active, earnest, helpful, reclaiming the fallen and guiding the footsteps of the weak. Already she saw Mrs. Pennefeather released from the drudgery of cheap novel-writing; the children provided with a governess; the overworked father able now and then to take a well-earned holiday!

Fain would she have written to her friend that very day, that very hour; but Lancelot bound her over to silence. She must wait till the plans were ready, the ground marked out, and the endowment papers drawn up. All this would take at least a month.

"There is one other good deed that you must remember to do for my sake, Lancelot," she said presently. "I want you to befriend poor Lettice Leigh."

"What do you wish me to do for her?"

"Well, to take care of her—to see that she and her poor little child want neither food nor firing. That cottage is a mere ruin" . . . .

"I beg your pardon. The cottage is perfectly weathertight — roof and flooring repaired; windows glazed and shuttered; new doors; new fastenings; new kitchen-range; everything complete and comfortable."

"You have done all this?"

"Did you not bid me turn out the ghost and mend the roof; and am I not the Slave of the Lamp?"

"You are my fairy prince, all generosity and goodness!"

With this, they drifted back into the old strain of lovers' talk, comparing their miniatures; promising to write by every alternate post; forgetting the hour, the place, and everything but each other.

"The features are yours—the eyes, the dear, true eyes, are yours," he said, holding the daguerreotype this way and that, to get it in a favourable light. "And yet, as with all these things, there is a ghostly unlikeness about it. I wonder if I shall ever succeed in making a decent portrait of you!"

"You must try, some day," she said, smiling.

"I *have* tried, dozens of times—in chalks, in oils, in water-colours; profiles, front faces, three-quarters! I was always trying—and failing. What chance had I, when I never had a sitting?"

"You never asked for one."

"I dared not. Yet sometimes I caught a touch of likeness that pleased me—a look of the eyes, perhaps—a turn of the head! I have an old Shakespeare at home, the margins scrawled all over with you, as Ophelia, as Imogen, Cordelia, Portia, Miranda. You little thought how many Shakespeare heroines you played for me, dearest, in those bygone days!"

The girl looked up at him; and as she looked, the tears came to her eyes.

"Lancelot," she said, "you must not give up painting. You will never be happy, if you do. It is your vocation."

He shook his head.

"I won't be half an artist, Winifred. Besides, you must not forget that if Fortune takes from me with the one hand, she bestows infinitely more upon me with the other. I give up Art; and I gain—*you*."

"But—but if you would have been happier the other way!" she said, looking aside.

"'The other way'—meaning without you whom I have loved from my boyhood? I could almost say, Winifred, that that is unkind."

"You know I do not mean it unkindly! But men are so different from women. Love is the woman's life—the beginning and the end of all her hopes and fears; but the man's vocation, the man's ambition, are more to him than love."

"My vocation, as you call it, is ruled by circumstances over which neither you nor I have any control," said Lancelot, gravely. "If I could have chosen—if I could have carved out my destiny, following my heart's desire, I would have been your husband, dear, and a painter; not very poor, because poverty is dis-

agreeable; not very rich either, except in love, and hope, and perhaps in fame. And I would have lived in Italy; for Italy is the artist's paradise, and the land of my earliest recollections. That would have been my dream. But it is a dream that could never have been realised. So long as I was free to be a painter, an impassable gulf divided your life from mine; and the change that left you free, made me—what I now am. To sigh after an impossible combination of circumstances would be folly, and worse than folly. I am here with work to do, and the will to do it, and your love to make me happy. Not to be a Raphael or a Titian, would I change back to where I was before."

Winifred said nothing; but the slight pressure of her hand upon his arm was answer enough.

So they strolled on for some moments in silence; understanding each other thoroughly, and very happy.

"I have often thought," he said, presently, "that Fate committed one of her grand mistakes when she disposed of Cuthbert's lot and mine. Never were two squarer men successively wedged into a round hole. He, poor dear fellow! cared no more about being a lord than I do. In fact, I think it bored him almost more than it bores me. I want to be an artist; he wanted to be a sailor. A sailor he was, too—a born sailor. The sea was his element; and as for navigation, I don't believe there was a yachtsman in Europe to equal him. I used to say that no one really knew Cuthbert who hadn't seen him on board his own boat in a gale of wind. Did I ever tell you about that storm off Cape Matapan? I mean, when I made that trip with him to the Ionian Islands five years ago. It came

sweeping down the Adriatic, and caught us in the Straits of Otranto, half-way between the two coasts. We ran before it all the way to Corfu. I shall never forget it, or his coolness—his hand on the tiller—his eye on the needle—only a word of command now and then, brief and ringing and stern—and the boat obeying the helm, like a good horse under a good rider. You said something just now about a man's vocation: that was his vocation—just as Art is mine. Yes; fate misplaced us both—gave us what other men covet, and withheld from us the things we ourselves coveted. He cared nothing for riches—no more do I. Politics bored him; and they bore me. The House of Lords was his bugbear; and it is mine. People used to say that he and I were curiously different; but it seems to me that we were curiously alike. What do you think?"

"I think you were as unlike as any two brothers could well be," said Winifred, speaking with that painful constraint which always came upon her when the conversation took this turn.

"You also? But in what way?"

"In every way."

"No, no—that is too vague, and too sweeping. I know we were alike in some things; and I only wish, for my own sake, that we were alike in more."

Winifred was silent. What could she say? To her, the lost Lord Brackenbury had always seemed immeasurably older than Lancelot; and as grave and dry as Lancelot was genial and joyous. She respected him; she admired him; she was half afraid of him—but she could never have loved him. To tell Lancelot this was impossible.

"He had ten times more character than I have," the young man continued, warming as he went on; "more character—more judgment—more determination—more tenacity. He was the sort of fellow who, when he had once made up his mind, never wavered. If it had been his duty to fire a mine, he would have put on his hat, walked in as coolly, and struck his match as deliberately, as if he had been lighting a cigarette."

"I quite believe that," said Winifred.

"He was ever so much more worthy of you, dear, than I am."

The constrained look went out of her face, and, with a child-like smile, she laid her cheek against his shoulder.

"You shall not disparage my hero," she said.

They were standing on the landward side of a giant oak which grew so close to the water's edge that its spreading boughs shadowed the path on the one side and overhung the water on the other. The stream—an arm of the Isar—eddied swiftly by, hastening to rejoin the river. Not a soul was in sight; not a sound of the city was audible. They were apparently as much alone as if they had been cast upon a desert island.

So Lancelot made the only answer that could well be made to words so sweet. He kissed her.

Perhaps his eyes looked lingeringly into hers; perhaps their lips met more than once. At all events, it was one of those foolish, fond, delightful moments, so prosaic in prose, so poetic in poetry, when nothing in life seems worth living for, or dying for, but love. Moments so few, so brief, so precious, that it was hard they should be interrupted—by a cough.

CHAPTER XVI.

THEIR FIRST QUARREL.

CIRCUMSPECTLY emerging from behind the tree-trunk, the owner of the cough (and a more discreetly modulated cough never proceeded from human lips) discovered only a young lady buttoning her glove, and a young man staring vacantly at the sky. He was an old gentleman, small, shrivelled, bright-eyed, with a book under his arm, and a scrap of ribbon in his button-hole. He must have been standing just at the other side of the big tree, on the very brink of the river; and being, doubtless, unwilling to assist unseen at so exceedingly private a conversation, had no choice between making his appearance and walking into the water.

He smiled—he would surely have been more than mortal if he could have helped it! But the lovers looked as lovers look when they are caught; red, and shy, and somewhat indignant.

"*Et ego in Arcadia vixi*," said the little old gentleman, lifting his hat, and walking briskly away.

For a moment they were both silent. Then Lancelot laughed uncomfortably.

"By Jove! now," he ejaculated, "who would have dreamed of that aged fossil being stowed away round the corner, like a light-comedy parent behind a screen at the end of the third act?"

"What did he say?"

"He quoted a Latin line from a picture of Nicolo Poussin's—'*et ego in Arcadia vixi;*' which means 'And I too lived in Arcadia.' I presume he wished to imply

that at some remote period in the early history of mankind, he had himself been young, and in love."

"How pretty!"

"Well, yes; and aptly quoted. I wonder who he is!"

"Tell me what the picture is like, Lancelot."

Lancelot wished the old gentleman and his Latinity at the bottom of the sea. Nevertheless, he did his best to describe the famous painting:—the shepherds who have discovered an antique tomb—the kneeling man who reads, tracing the epitaph with his finger—the maiden standing by, with her hand on her lover's shoulder—the simple awe and wonder in the face of the boy who leans upon his crook, listening—the classic grouping—the clear, still sky—the trees and distant mountains, which have a look of belonging to the young days of the world.

Winifred listened breathlessly.

"Where is this picture?" she asked.

"In the Louvre."

"It must be one of the most beautiful pictures in the world!"

"Don't think that, or when you see it, you will be disappointed. It is not very beautiful; in fact, it is scarcely to be called beautiful in any sense. But it is purely ideal, purely classical—a Theocritan idyll on canvas."

"How many great pictures there are, waiting for me to see them!" said Winifred.

"And for me to show them to you."

"And what wonderful places!"

"To which I will take you."

Still strolling slowly, they had now come to where

a broad road opened down towards the bridge leading to the Baths of Brunnthal; and this was their direct way back to Pastor Kreutzmann's house. But Lancelot made as if he would still keep on through the park.

"Let us go a little further," he said. "I have something more to say to you; and it is our last walk!"

"But it must be one o'clock."

"It is nearly two; and as you may be quite sure that our good friends dined at least one hour ago, you need not scruple to stay a few minutes longer."

"Do you know that we have been out since half-past ten?"

"And when shall we be out together again? Not for three months, Winifred. It is a long time to look forward to."

"The time will pass more quickly for you than for me," she said. "It is not half so hard to go as to be left behind."

"Are you so sure of that? To be left behind is to submit to fate, and partakes of the inevitable. To go is like wrenching out one's own tooth, or pulling the string of a shower-bath. But, dear, it rests with you to make our parting many degrees less bitter."

"With me! How can I do that?"

"By promising me that when we next meet, it shall be to part no more."

"Are you not coming at Easter?"

"At Easter, if I live and breathe."

"But—but at Easter . . . it is impossible."

"Why impossible?"

"Need you ask? It is only three months hence."

Then, despite that unlucky episode of the old

gentleman and his cough—an episode which, for the moment, seriously imperilled the gravity of the situation—Lancelot became eloquent with a lover's eloquence. Situated as they two were situated, separated by distance as well as by time, three months were as long to them as three years would be to most others. Why need they wait longer? Already six weeks had gone by since Miss Langtrey's death, and by Easter the lapse of time would be nearer to five months than four. By what law of custom, by what scruple of affection, or sorrow, or common sense, was Winifred called upon to defer her marriage beyond that period? For himself, no time could possibly be so convenient as the Easter recess. In the three months now intervening, he would wind up his brother's affairs and despatch his own arrears of business. The new cottages would meanwhile be building, and the new church be so far advanced that he could safely leave it to be finished in his absence. Then, marrying in April, they would remain abroad through the summer; or, if she preferred it, they could stay away till her year of mourning should expire. Besides, he had promised himself that he would take her to Greece and Italy for their wedding journey; and for Greece and Italy there was no time like the last of the spring and the first of the summer. Should they not take their happiness when the birds take theirs—"in the sweet o' the year"?

But still she would not.

"It is too soon," she said again. "It will be time enough next spring."

Next spring! This was too much.

"Good heavens! Winifred," he said, vehemently, "you cannot be serious! Life is not long enough for

such procrastination. If, like the early Chaldean kings, we had forty-three thousand years of wisdom and usefulness to look forward to, the thing would be different. Then

> 'I would
> Love you ten years before the Flood,
> And you should, if you pleased, refuse
> Till the conversion of the Jews;'

but, unfortunately for us, life has become ridiculously short since those days. You forget, child, that time is going, that youth is fleeting, that the hours once struck are past for ever. You forget that we are alone, absolutely alone in the world—you and I! We have no one to please but each other. Why, then, when Fate no longer divides us, shall we be so unmindful of the uncertainties of life as to divide ourselves? Besides, who shall say what another year may bring forth? For my own part, I shall never feel really safe, till I have put the ring upon your finger."

"What do you mean by 'safe'?" she said, her cheek flushing, her eye kindling indignantly. "Do you suppose I am incapable of remaining constant for a year?"

Now this was not in the least what Lancelot meant; but before he could explain himself, their conversation was interrupted by the sudden appearance of Frau Kreutzmann hastening towards them with her hands uplifted and a face beaming over with smiles.

"*Ach, lieber Gott!* Well met, truants and runaways! We thought you were lost, and made sure we should have to write up a description of you at the Polizei! And have you had nothing to eat all these hours? So —so, Fräulein Winifred, you must be fainting away,

dear child, with hunger. We waited dinner till the braten was almost spoiled—a beef braten it was, with apple-sauce and mushrooms; and though it was of my own cooking, I must say it was a dish for the King! We had hoped, too, as it was the Herr Baron's last day in Munich, that he would come in and take a bit of our family dinner. Yes, my gracious lord, and I made a raspberry-jam kücken on purpose; for I remembered you praised the raspberry-jam kücken the night of our Christmas party. But truly, it's dreadful to think that you are both fasting all this time, and have not had so much as a biscuit! However, I will turn back with you at once, and in five minutes we will warm up a bit of dinner. No, no, no—it's not a trouble, but a pleasure! My business will wait. I was only going to the Holtz-Garten to order in a load or two of brushwood; and that will do to-morrow as well as to-day. On my word, I could not be happy if I didn't go home with you, and see you comfortable."

So the good soul turned back with them, and Lancelot, after trying in vain to edge in a word, or even a look, of explanation, fell moodily into the rear. Then, when they reached the house, the two girls swooped down upon Winifred, and carried her off to her own room; Frau Kreutzmann bustled away to the kitchen; and the "Herr Baron" was left to amuse himself as best he could in the absent pastor's study.

It was their first misunderstanding, and he was proportionately disconsolate; for in the matter of lovers' quarrels, as in most other terrible and cataclysmal phenomena, familiarity breeds the habit of contempt. Dwellers on the slopes of Etna and the plateaux of Mexico are apt to think lightly of eruptions and earth-

quakes; and Lancelot would probably have felt less miserable on the present occasion, if his courtship had been enlivened by the average amount of skirmishing. As it was, he took up first one book, then another; walked restlessly about the room; listened to every footfall; and was quite chopfallen when half an hour went by, and no Winifred appeared.

At length Frau Kreutzmann came herself to summon him to dinner; and a wonderful improvisation that dinner was, consisting of soup, fish, a réchauffé of the braten, a winter salad, and the remains of the raspberry kücken. But Winifred was silent and would not look at him; and their good hostess chattered incessantly; and her nieces waited upon the guests; and they were not left alone for a moment. Then coffee was brought; and Lancelot, looking at his watch, saw with dismay that it was already four o'clock, and that if he was to get back to the Hotel Maulick in time to pack his portmanteau, pay his bill, and catch the five-thirty express, he must be gone in something less than a quarter of an hour.

"Will you let me speak to you for a moment, Winifred, before I go?" he said, going over to the window where she was standing with Brenda, looking out upon the darkening sky.

"By all means."

"But——alone?"

She said nothing; but kept her face coldly averted.

Lancelot looked imploringly at Brenda; and Brenda, remembering that these would be their last moments together before parting, beckoned to the others to follow her, and slipped out of the room.

Then Lancelot spoke hurriedly and earnestly. The

words that offended her had escaped him unawares. He had not intended to utter them—he was bitterly sorry that he had uttered them; but she had entirely misapprehended their import. To imply doubt of her constancy was of all things the farthest from his thoughts. He believed in her, he trusted her, as he believed and trusted in honour, love, truth itself!

Still she kept her face averted.

"What did you mean, then?" she asked, in a somewhat softened tone.

He hesitated.

"Can you not guess?"

Again she was silent.

"Do you not understand . . . . that . . . . that . . . . Good heavens! Winifred, after waiting, praying, hoping in vain for four long years, shall I now be such a wretch as to feel that if my brother came back to life, I could not bid him welcome?"

"Lancelot!"

"But once you are my wife . . . . then—ah! now you know what I mean!"

"Yes, now I know!" she sobbed, clasping his neck and weeping on his breast. "Dearest forgive me!"

"And you will promise me, my angel—in the spring?"

"Yes, I promise—in the spring."

CHAPTER XVII.

A VICTORY.

LANCELOT made but one journey of it from Munich to London, and thence went straight to Old Court without stopping. Here he immediately became overwhelmed with business; yet he did not therefore forget Winifred's charge to him, nor his own promise, to be good to Lettice Leigh. He had not, in fact, been three days at home before he paid her a visit.

He had been over to see one of his tenants at a place which rejoiced in the poetical name of Hogsclough Farm, and so rode back by way of the Ridge. By the time he reached Abel Brunt's cottage, the afternoon was wearing towards dusk. There was, however, still light enough to show him how thoroughly his orders had been carried out in the way of roofing and repairing, and how completely Horace Cochrane's chosen sketch had lost all claim to the picturesqueness of dilapidation.

Half smiling as he thought of the dismay that would come into his friend's countenance when he should see the place under its restored aspect, Lancelot tied his horse up to the little gate and knocked upon the door with the handle of his riding-whip.

Not till he had knocked a second time was he answered by a woman's voice asking:—

"Woas theer?"

He announced himself; and the bolts were slowly drawn back.

"You have not forgotten me, Lettice?" he said, coming in with his bright, assured look.

She stood before him, silently down-looking.

"I wanted to see if they had made the cottage comfortable for you," he went on, casting a rapid glance round the dim little kitchen. "What a poor fire you have! I bade Moreton send you up a load of wood—hasn't it come yet?"

A three-legged stool and an old box turned upside down, by way of seats, an ancient worm-eaten table from the lumber-stores at The Grange, a few cracked plates and mugs on a shelf, a straw paliasse covered with an old rug in one corner, and a piece of much-mended carpet on the hearth, were all the furniture the room contained. But there was a cat asleep before the fire, which gave a more home-like look to the place; and in the window-seat there crouched a little boy, staring with bright, wide-open eyes at the strange gentleman.

"I moind ye weel, Maister La'celot," she said, at length.

"It must be six or eight years since we last met, Lettice. We are both changed since then."

She put a couple of logs on the fire, and dusted the stool with her apron.

"I'n gettin' nowt but a cricket* for ye to set on, sir," she said.

But he still stood looking round enquiringly.

"You are very comfortless here," he said. "Is that your bed? And have you no warmer coverings? You should not have been in such destitution all these weeks, if I had known it."

"We'n had roof an' foir, Maister La'celot—an' we'n knowed what 'tis to be wi'out either."

* "Cricket"—a three-legged stool.

"I'm sorry to hear it. I'll send you down a cart-load of necessaries to-morrow."

The woman looked at him furtively from under her black brows.

"I dunno why ye should fash* yoursel' fur the loikes of us, sir," she muttered.

"I'll tell you why. Because you are one of our own people; and because Miss Winifred especially desired me to look after you."

"Did Miss Winifred think o' we?" she asked, with a touch of eagerness in her voice.

"She did, Lettice. And, besides these reasons, I think—I fear—that you have a special claim upon my compassion."

All this time he had, apparently, taken no notice of the child; but now he went over to the window, and patted the little fellow on the cheek.

"What is your name, my man?"

The boy stared at him shyly, without answering.

"Is it Samuel? Samuel Leigh? Ah, I thought as much. Lettice, my girl, I know your trouble, and I am heartily sorry for you."

She shrunk back, as if she had been struck.

"I doan't want no pity," she said, fiercely. "I on'y ask folk to let me be."

"If I have hurt your feelings, Lettice, I beg your pardon."

He said this with extreme gentleness. Then, after a moment, he added:—

"If anyone has the right to name this painful subject to you, Lettice, it is I. The man was a heartless

* "Fash"—trouble.

scoundrel; and, but for us, you would never have known him. You have a claim to help and kindness at my hands."

She stood silent, with averted face.

"Had my brother lived, and had he come to know of it, as I did, months and months after, he would have seen you righted. Do you ever hear from him?"

She shook her head.

"Has he never done anything for you—nor for his child?"

She tried to speak; but the words caught her breath and turned to sobs.

Then, knowing that it was best to let her weep, if she could weep, Lancelot drew the boy to his knee, talking to him softly and kindly; while the logs blazed up and lit the room, and the twilight gathered outside. Lettice Leigh, meanwhile, her face buried in her hands, strove vainly to choke back the tears that now came thick and fast.

"I'd—I'd liefer ha' cut my hand off, than gi'en away thus!" she said, dashing the drops angrily from her eyes. "But—but whan ye coom to ax me 'bout the child—the child that's worse nor faytherless . . . . But there! I'll answer yer question, Maister La'celot. 'T faythers ne'er doon nowt for 'un—ne'er laid eyes on 'un—ne'er keered to know whether a' were born wick* or dead! Mony's the toime we'n been welly clemmed** wi' hunger and cold; but 'twar nowt to he, so long as un 'ud gotten shut*** on us!"

* "Wick"—alive.
** "Welly clemmed"—almost starved.
*** "Gotten shut"—got rid of.

"Neither you nor your boy shall know cold or hunger again, my poor girl."

The little fellow, grown suddenly friendly, was playing with Lancelot's watch-chain. She looked; and as she looked, her face and her voice softened.

"God bless you, sir," she said. "Ye're mylord now, they tell me."

"Ay, Lettice—to my sorrow."

He sighed, passing his hand over the child's hair, and staring absently at the fire.

Then there was a long silence.

"Did ye seen nowt on him whan ye went out, fowr year agoo?" she asked, suddenly.

His thoughts were far away, and the question startled him.

"Did I see him?"

For the moment, he thought only of his brother. Then, meeting her wistful eyes, he took her meaning.

"Did I see Prouting? Yes, surely—I saw him. He was with me for some weeks."

"An'—an' then?"

"And then, when I was about to come back to England, he took service with a new master."

"Out there?"

"Yes—in Genoa. I gave him a character, in fact—a better character than he deserved."

"Genoa!" she repeated, as if trying to fix the name in her memory. "Genoa!"

"Ah, but he was leaving there immediately. The gentleman who engaged him was an American, bound, if I remember righly, for New York."

"Then—then where 'ull a' be now, sir, d'ye think?" she asked, tremulously.

Lancelot shook his head.

"Who can say? Wages are high over there—perhaps he is still in America. But indeed, Lettice, you must resolve to forget him."

Then with a few last kindly words, the young man rose to go.

"If you are lonely here," he said, "I can put you into some other cottage, where you will have neighbours. Would you better like to live at Danebridge, or in Langtrey village?"

"I doan't want no neebors. I'd liefer bide where I be."

"You are not afraid here?"

"Why should I be afeard? The dead doan't coom back."

He smiled.

"Nay," he said, "I was not thinking of poor Abel Brunt, nor yet of his ghost. I was thinking of the living."

"I bayn't afeard o' the livin', nayther," she said, with one of her fierce looks.

"It is a solitary place."

"No pleece can't be too lonesome for me, sir."

"As you like, my girl. If anyone interferes with you, you have but to let me know, and I will move you elsewhere. You are right, at all events, to draw your bolts betimes."

With this, he slipped some silver into the child's hand and went to the door.

"I draa's 'em, sir; but I aw'm nowt skeert,* aw the same," she said, following him to the gate. "Besides,

* "Skeert"—scared.

folk be dalicate* abite** coomin' this road arter sun-down."

"I will tell Miss Winifred that I have seen you, Lettice," he said, as he swung himself into the saddle. "Shall I give her any message? I shall be writing to-night."

"To Miss Win'fred?"

"Yes, to Miss Winifred."

"Ye mun tell her little Sam's doin' gradely."***

"Nothing more?"

"I'se nowt else to say, sir."

"May I not tell her that you have made up your mind about sending the boy to school, Lettice. That's what Miss Winifred has set her heart upon."

She stood with her hand on the gate, sullenly hesitating.

"Eh, then," she said at length, "if so be's Miss Win'fred's sot her haart on't, I spose she munna be gainsaid."

And so, as he rode away in the gloaming, Lancelot felt that he had achieved a victory.

He found a post-bag full of letters awaiting him, when he got back to Old Court. Only three days at home, and yet the whole world seemed to know of his return! Here were circulars from Singleton, Birmingham, Crewe, and Manchester tradesmen; notices of subscriptions due to all kinds of charitable institutions, local museums, libraries, schools, and the like; begging-letters from parsons in want of bells, porches, organs, and general repairs; and Christmas bills without number.

* "Dalicate"—delicate, *i.e.* unwilling.

** "Abite"—about. *** "Gradely"—well, excellently.

Having heard from Winifred by the morning mail, Lancelot knew that he was guilty of an act of weakness when he turned over this pile of miscellaneous matter, in search of a possible second letter. No such second letter, however, was there to be found; the only grains of corn in the midst of all this chaff being a business note from Mr. Marrables, and an official envelope addressed in the somewhat studied handwriting of his friend, Mr. Horace Cochrane.

Leaving the rest to be glanced through after dinner, Lancelot put these two in his pocket, and read them in his dressing-room. The lawyer's communication was brief enough, and related to an appointment for the following day. Cochrane's letter was long, written with evident care, and ran as follows:—

"Wax and Wafer Department, Downing Street,
"January —, 18—.

"My dear Brackenbury,

"A piece of news which in a manner concerns you, and which may very materially concern me, has just come to my knowledge. Sir Grimsby Turnbull, for reasons connected, as I understand, with some great engineering project in British Guiana, is about to accept the Chiltern Hundreds. The Brackenbury Iron Company will consequently lose its chairman, and the Borough of Singleton its M.P.

"Now, my dear Brackenbury, I know that your political opinions are not very prononcés; and that Sir Grimsby, being a Liberal, was understood to be indebted to your tolerance for his seat, two years ago. Still, I think I am right in assuming that, where the representation of your borough is concerned, you would

prefer that a Conservative candidate should be returned; and if I were that Conservative candidate, I venture also to believe that your regard for myself would lead you to give me something more than a merely nominal support.

"It may, perhaps, surprise you that, being only a Government official with limited private means, I should think of entering public life. But, in truth, it is not that I seek to achieve greatness; but that I find greatness, if not actually thrust upon me, at all events suggested to me by my superiors in office. In a private conversation the other day with the chief of my department, I was informed that Lord Glendinning was especially anxious just now to strengthen the hands of the Government in any direction where an opening might occur; and that Mr. Bazalgette had singled me out as one of the 'rising men' who would be likely to render the sort of service which is needed in the House. Then this morning came the news that Singleton would shortly be vacated; and I thought I could not do better than write to you at once.

"I need not say how pleased I shall be if you approve of the idea, or how anxiously I await your reply.

"Ever, my dear Brackenbury,

"Yours, faithfully and truly,

"HORACE COCHRANE.

To the Lord Brackenbury."

To this letter, Lancelot replied in eight lines:—

"Old Court, Jan. —, 18—.

"MY DEAR COCHRANE,

"Because Sir Grimsby Turnbull was Chairman of the Iron Company, and because my brother had pro-

mised to back him if ever the opportunity should arise, I did not oppose his election. But I am glad to hear he is going.

"Come down to Old Court whenever it suits you, and I will put you through.

"Yours ever,

"BRACKENBURY."

CHAPTER XVIII.

LANCELOT'S LETTERS.

THE new Lord of Brackenbury soon discovered that he had under-estimated, rather than over-estimated, the amount of work awaiting his return. It may readily be conceived how dry, disagreeable and fatiguing much of that work could not fail to be. Perpetual consultations with Mr. Marrables; frequent journeyings to and fro between Brackenbury, Singleton, Stoke, and Leek; questions of drainage, of repairs, of manorial rights and privileges; difficulties with the Iron Company, difficulties with the tenant-farmers, and difficulties with the "dark-folk" and the gamekeepers; these, and a hundred-and-one similar anxieties and worries, consumed his days and well-nigh exhausted his patience. Then, in the evenings there were letters to be read and answered, drafts of deeds to be revised; plans and estimates to be considered, and the like; to say nothing of a long correspondence with the Bishop of the diocese in regard of the new church and living, or of the time and trouble necessarily devoted to the buildings for the colony on the moor.

Meanwhile, his gun rusted; his colours dried in their tubes; all hope of contributing to the salon was given up; and "Divine Philosophy" not only went to the wall, but remained with her face towards it, unturned, unlooked at, almost forgotten. For art, the new Lord of Brackenbury had now no leisure; for society and for sport, no inclination. In vain his neighbours invited him to dinners, shooting-parties, and hunt-breakfasts; in vain was he pressed to become a steward at the county ball, and to accept the Vice-President's chair at the annual Conservative dinner. To one and all, he returned the same courteous but decided negative.

"What these good people do not understand," he wrote about this time, in one of his many letters to Miss Savage, "is that I am in truth not only much too busy for entertainments of the kind, but that I very strongly feel it my duty to hold myself aloof just now from gaieties and public meetings. For, in assuming my dearest Cuthbert's name and place, I virtually, and for the first time, accept the fact of his disappearance in proof of his decease; and it seems to me that, so accepting it, I am almost as much bound to observe the usages of mourning as if I had just received authentic intelligence of his death. Anyhow, I take it that if even I were not so overwhelmed with business cares, the present is not a time for feasting and making merry.

"I have been obliged to go to Brackenbury Court several times of late; and there everything reminds me of him painfully. Last week the shutters were unclosed and the ground-floor rooms thrown open, for the first time these four years. I went over them with Mrs.

Jennings, and decided on a thorough renovation of the drawing-room and ball-room suites. I also fixed upon a charming little boudoir for you, and made up my mind as to the rooms we will ourselves occupy. It was very sad going into the library, and finding everything just as he had left it. In his desk lay the very pen he had last used, with the ink dry on it; and between the sheets of his blotting book I found a paper covered with jottings for his journey—names of hotels at which he meant to put up, and the dates at which letters should be posted in England to catch the Thursday boats from Marseilles. These memoranda were designed, no doubt, for your instruction and mine.

"I knew he was exceedingly methodical, but I was scarcely prepared to find his papers in such wonderful order. The drawers of his writing table were full of packets of letters—yours, mine, my father's, and a few from my beloved mother—all tied up, docketed, and dated. There is nothing in this world so sad, to my thinking, as old letters; but what a climax of mournfulness is reached when, like some of these, they are from the dead to the dead! I have, of course, preserved those written by my parents. Yours are put aside, to be returned to you or destroyed, as you may prefer. My own—some of them in roundhand, written when I was quite a little chap, others from school at Lausanne, and so on up to the beginning of last year—I at once consigned to the fire. I was greatly affected to find that the dear fellow had kept, as I verily believe, every scrawl I ever sent him."

Writing soon after in a somewhat lighter strain, he said:—

"I live in a whirl of work, and thank my stars daily that it has graciously pleased Her Majesty again to prorogue the Houses; so giving me time to push through some of my business before rushing up to town. It seems that I am doomed to move the Address to the Throne; this being a duty generally imposed, by way of compliment, upon a peer who takes his seat for the first time. I would fain have evaded the honour; but an old friend of my father's, the Duke of Saxmundham, who seems to have taken upon himself to play Mentor to my Telemachus, will have it so; and I can't escape the ordeal."

Then, about a fortnight later, came some account of his début.

"I got back last night from London, having been a good boy, and done all that was required of me. The old Duke patted me on the back, and said that I acquitted myself very well indeed; but for my own part, I believe that I delivered my half-dozen sentences about as badly as possible. And no wonder; for not only was I horribly nervous, but I was at the same time keenly alive to the absurdity of my position. Imagine having to entreat the House to extend to me that indulgence which it invariably accords to noble lords on similar occasions! Imagine standing up and calling one's self a 'noble lord!' I never felt so like a fool in my life; nor, I suspect, looked so much like one, either.

"The Queen read her Speech, as she always does read it, very beautifully. Her voice is singularly sweet, and her enunciation perfect. I suppose it will interest you to hear that she wore the Koh-i-noor in the front of her dress. I suppose it is very splendid; but to my

ignorant eyes it looked no better than a cut-glass decanter-stopper. The Prince is getting bald; and I thought he looked pale and care-worn."

Writing to her three or four times in every week, he of course interlarded his letters with numerous details of his own daily doings; with scraps of local news; and with large quantities of such tender "padding" as befitted the circumstances of the correspondence. Treated summarily, the scant local news of a dozen weeks would barely fill a dozen sentences. He had been over to The Grange, seen her dogs and her pigeons, and distributed the gifts with which she had entrusted him. Bridget was delighted with her workbox, and Joan with her apron; the former felt her rheumatism this winter somewhat more severely than usual. Reuben evidently thought the beer-mug too good to drink out of, and was so overwhelmed that he could not even express his gratitude. The cob had had a swollen hock, and been successfully doctored by a new farrier from Knypersley. The old folk in the drift-cottages were all well, and desired their duty. Lettice Leigh's little boy was going to school quite regularly, and making rapid progress. Joan was engaged to George, Miss Brocklehurst's groom, who had lately set up for himself as a blacksmith at Danebridge; and the largest of the big walnut-trees in the meadow fronting The Grange had been blown down one stormy night shortly after Christmas. The same rough weather had torn half the tiles off the roof of the little barn, and damaged one of the beautiful old chimney-stacks at the N.E. corner of the quadrangle. Lancelot had at once despatched his own builder to repair the damage, and had desired that worthy to draw up a

list of such repairs as were immediately necessary at The Grange.

The parish news was as meagre as the home chronicle. The Rector and Mrs. Caldicott were off to town for a fortnight "on law business;" which, according to Mrs. Pennefeather, meant to see the Pantomimes. The Pennefeathers themselves were much as usual; the curate's headaches being somewhat less persistent than last year. Mrs. Pennefeather desired him (Lancelot) to give her love, and to say that "The Ghostly Cat" had made such a decided hit, that the editor of *Gog and Magog* had actually invited her to write a serial story, and upon such terms as she had never before been offered. For this success, she declared, she was entirely Winifred's debtor. Mr. Fink and Countess Castelrosso were wintering on the Nile, and coming home by way of Palmyra and Damascus. It was thought they would be absent for six months. Lady Symes had gone to Torquay, having dispensed her usual Christmas bounties, and sent Mr. Caldicott a cheque for £25 for the poor of his parish. Miss Langtrey's monument, meanwhile, was now completed according to a design which Winifred had approved. It consisted of an upright foliated cross of grey polished granite, with an enclosed space in front; the whole surrounded by a Gothic railing. The "space" had already been planted with white and purple hyacinths. He promised to send a sketch of it, as soon as he should have time to go over there again.

Then came the news that Cochrane had arrived at Old Court in the time-honoured character of "the Conservative Candidate." Not, of course, that there was any other candidate. Such an event as a con-

tested election was unknown in the patriarchal little borough of Singleton, where from time immemorial the worthy electors had been wont to receive his Lordship's nominee as unquestioningly as they ate his roast beef and plum pudding at the annual tenants' dinner. "We canvassed on Tuesday," Lancelot reported; "that is to say, we called on half a dozen people, invited them to luncheon at 'The Three Feathers,' and got home an hour before dinner. To-day we elected him; which means that three or four shop-keepers talked bad grammar, and the thing was done. He seems vastly pleased, and has visions of Governmental loaves and fishes. At all events, he can 'write himself down an ass'—I beg his pardon; I mean an M.P."

As the spring advanced, his letters became more and more taken up with the work which was being done on the moor. The ground was marked out within a fortnight of his return from Munich; and on the last day of January, he himself laid the first stone of the new church. After this, an army of workmen being put on and the weather continuing exceptionally dry and favourable, the building made rapid progress. By the middle of March, he was able to report that walls and roofing-timbers were already up; also that the foundations of the school-house and vicarage were laid, and that the cottages were ready for the tiler.

Mr. Pennefeather had by this time been made aware of the good fortune in store for him, and he had sent in his resignation of the curacy.

"I think they are very happy in their new prospects," wrote Lancelot. "The way they received the offer was characteristic of both. Having an appointment with Marrables, I rode round by way of the

Hermitage. They had just dined, and the things were still on the table. He was standing before the fire, looking gaunt and careworn, with something in his hand which I am sure was a bill. The baby was sprawling about on an old shawl spread upon the floor. Mrs. Pennefeather was scribbling away at that little davenport by the window—doing, what do you suppose? Writing a sermon from dictation! She said she often did so, 'to spare Derwent's eyes.' Her own, poor little woman! looked as if they wanted rest at least as much as his. Indeed, I think she had been crying. I stated my business as briefly, and in as matter-of-fact a style, as possible. 'They will be a rough lot of parishioners,' I said; 'and it will be a horribly dull hole for any parson to pitch his tent in; but the living is at your service, Mr. Pennefeather, if you care to accept it." He listened with his eyes fixed on the floor, and continued silent when I had done speaking. I saw the colour rush up into Mrs. Pennefeather's face. She looked at him, and clasped her hands nervously. Inconceivable as it seemed, I saw at once that she was afraid he would decline. Finding he did not answer, I spoke again. 'There will, at all events, be no lack of work on the moor,' I said; 'and I know you are not afraid of work, Mr. Pennefeather.' Then he spoke. 'It is a great work,' he said; 'but it will demand a special gift of persuasion. I question if I am worthy of the mission.' To this I replied that I knew no one so worthy; and then, taking his acceptance for granted, I went on to speak about the dark-folk, and the trouble I feared they would give him. "The living,' I said, 'will be worth £500 a year, besides thirteen acres of glebe. But you

know what poor stuff the land is up there; too much like the people, I fear — more prone to tares than wheat.' 'The tares must be rooted up and cast into the fire!' he said, with energy. Then, dropping his voice, he added, as if to himself:—'But if a blessing goes with the good seed, it will grow—it will grow.' I vow to Heaven, Winifred, I looked at the man with envy. Lifted in one moment out of grinding poverty into comparative affluence, he yet thought neither of money, nor house, nor land; but only of the task to be done, and the souls to be saved! But his words showed, at all events, that he accepted the duty; and that was enough. Mrs. Pennefeather, meanwhile, had taken her baby in her arms, and was kissing it and crying over it, quite quietly, by the window. As for myself, I had a lump in my throat that almost choked me. However, I blurted out something about being in an awful hurry, and glad it was settled; and then I just squeezed his hand, and—bolted! I have seen a good deal of him since then, for we have many things to talk over and arrange; and the more I see of him, the better I like him. A more earnest, simple-minded, loveable fellow never breathed."

It will be gathered, from the foregoing extracts, that Lancelot was busy enough in these days; and that if his work was heavy and his worries were many, he at all events enjoyed the exquisite happiness of making others happy.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHERE WAS 'TONIO MORETTI?

BLOOD!

The boy belonging to the Trattoria, who came every morning to clean and sweep up, and old Anita, who at this season of the year was at her post as soon as it was full daylight, were first to give the alarm. Then came Maria the serving-maid, and Giuseppe the cook, quickly followed by the landlord and his family. And then, scrambling out of their beds, flinging open their windows, screaming shrill questions to those below, the lodgers, in various stages of undress, came scurrying down, almost tumbling over each other, and crowding to the gateway.

Blood!

Whose blood? How shed? When, and by whom? What had happened under that dark arch in the dead of night, when the dwellers in the Osteria del Cappello were asleep in their beds? Questions which all asked and none could answer. If murder had been done, it had been done so swiftly and silently, that not a sound, not a cry, had jarred upon the stillness of the night.

Stefano Beni, waking to the shrill clamour, did as the rest—ran to the window; saw that something unusual had happened; flung on his clothes, and hurried down.

"What is it all about? What is the matter?" he asked, first of one, then of another.

"Murder is the matter!"

"There has been an assassination under the archway!"

"There's blood on the stones!"

"Blood that's not yet dry!"

He pushed his way through the crowd, and there, in truth, just midway of the gateway, lay an ominous crimson pool, connected by a trail with another and a smaller pool close against the street-kerb.

"'Tis blood, sure enough," said the wheelwright; "but I don't see why it need mean murder. I bled as much from the nose, one hot day last summer."

There was an outcry of dissent. A murder it was, and a murder it should be! They were not going to be defrauded of their tragedy in that way.

Darting forward with a sudden cry, one of the women stooped, snatched something from between the stones, and held it on high for all to see.

"Dio! see here, neighbour Stefano! Was your bleeding brought on by such a thing as this?"

It was a broken knife-blade about two inches and a half in length, and three-quarters of an inch in breadth.

The wheelwright looked grave, as well he might; and the babble of tongues, checked for one second, broke out shriller than before.

"It looks as if it might have been six inches long before it was snapped across," said the landlord, turning it this way and that.

"It is a dagger—it cuts both ways!" cried the woman who had picked it up.

Stefano Beni put on his glasses.

"It is not a dagger," he said. "It is a knife-blade, newly ground to a double edge."

"Ground for the purpose!" said the landlord, solemnly shaking his head.

And then again the women shrieked that it was a murder—an assassination—a vendetta!

"But there is no blood on it," said Stefano Beni, drily.

It was true. There was no blood on it—not a smear; not a speck!

The thing seemed almost incredible. Here was the broken weapon of the assassin—yonder, the blood of the victim. How, then, could the blade be unstained?

"Che! che! che!" said the wheelwright, contemptuously. "Murders are not committed in this way; and murdered men don't generally walk away, to save folk the trouble of burying them! A drunken scuffle, a broken knife, a cut finger, maybe—and there's your murder!"

The landlord put on his judicial air.

"There's more blood here than ever came of a cut finger," he said. "But can't you do better than to stand staring and guessing? Where is the handle and the rest of the blade? Find that, and we should perhaps get a clue to the mystery. But there! it's no good attempting to search, unless you all clear out of the gateway! Stand back, Monna Teresa—stand back, Giuseppe! By your leave, Dame Giannetta! Come into the courtyard, good friends, or go out into the street, as you like best! Now, 'Lina Pezzi, since your eyes are so sharp, try if you can find the handle!"

Thus encouraged, the woman who had picked up the piece of broken blade went to and fro, peering between the stones, scraping over the rubbish-drifts in

the corners, and examining the contents of the street-gutter outside; but for all her searching, neither she nor anyone else could find the other half of the weapon.

"If I lent you my spectacles, 'Lina Pezzi, maybe you'd discover the corpse," said Stefano Beni.

Poor as the joke was, it raised a laugh, and changed the temper of the crowd.

"Murder or no murder, I won't waste my time any longer," said the cobbler, shuffling off to his stall.

"Nor I mine," echoed Basilio, the joiner. "I've a coffin to finish before breakfast, and my customer won't wait."

"And before I earn a soldo to-day, I must take my mare round to the blacksmith's, to be shod," growled Paolo, the vetturino.

Then the landlord bade his lad fetch sawdust to soak up the blood, and a mop and a bucket of water, to cleanse out the gateway; and presently the men dropped off one by one to their work; and old Anita lit her brazier and spread her chestnuts to roast; and only Monna Teresa, Dame Giannetta, Brigita, and some others of the more inveterate gossips, lingered, and wondered, and chattered, till the last crimson stain was washed away.

Sleeping at the back of the house—sleeping soundly, too, after lying awake and weeping half the night—La Giulietta heard nothing of the clamour that roused her uncle in his bed-chamber overlooking the courtyard. But she woke with a start, nevertheless, conscious that she had slept too late; that she had dreamed troubled dreams; that something was wrong—though what that something was, she could not at first remember.

Then it all flashed back upon her memory. He was gone—gone to share the perils of those who go down to the sea in ships! This was why her dreams had been all of wreck and disaster. This was why she woke with that dead weight at her heart.

But she must not begin the day with tears and terrors. She must get up quickly, and light a little fire of sticks and pine-cones; for Uncle Stefano has a big cup of hot boiled milk every morning before he goes off to his workshop in the Piazza Brà; and that cup of milk and a dry crust are all the food he takes till midday, when he comes home to dinner.

So La Giulietta made haste with her simple toilet, and ran to knock at her uncle's door as she went by.

"Uncle Stefano!"

But he was neither in his bed-room, nor in the outer room, nor in the balcony. He had got up without being called, and gone out without waiting for breakfast.

Was he so early, then, or was she so late?

The clock pointed to a quarter past seven. Cielo! so late? How could she have slept to such an hour? And the little uncle, rather than awaken her, had gone away fasting! She would run down at once to the Trattoria, and learn whether he had taken a cup of coffee before starting. If not, she must boil his milk without a moment's delay, and take it in a stone bottle to the Piazza Brà.

Opening the outer door, however, she found herself face to face with Monna Brigita.

"Ecco, my child!" said the clogmaker's wife, "I was just coming to you with a message from your Uncle Beni. He is gone to work, and will get a bit

and sup at Donda's Café in the Leonana as he goes along."

"Oh, Monna Brigita, I am so vexed! I cannot think how I came to sleep so late!"

"Late or early, my child, you have nothing to be vexed about," said Monna Brigita. "He only did not care to take the time or trouble to come up all these stairs again."

"Had he gone down, then, for anything?"

"Gone down!—why, don't you know?"

"Don't I know what?"

"Oh, the Blessed Saints! Such a scene as we've had, and you to have heard and seen nothing! Nay, then, cara Giulietta, I must come in for a minute and tell you all about it!"

So Monna Brigita came in and sat herself down; and, with such embellishments and exaggerations as her imagination suggested, told the whole marvellous story from beginning to end. Meanwhile, La Giulietta, listening with parted lips and frightened eyes, grew paler and paler as the narrative went on.

"Your uncle may scoff as he pleases," said Monna Brigita, when she had talked herself out of breath, "but I maintain that a black deed of some sort was done last night under our gateway; and if it wasn't murder, it was something very like it! You should have seen the blood! Two big pools, and the stones all splashed between, as if the poor wounded wretch had tried to get away, and was stabbed a second time. But there! I declare you're as white as a ghost, child!"

White, indeed! She might well look white; for her thoughts flew at once to her lover, and her very soul

turned sick with horror. Not vainly had she felt that vague presentiment of evil when they parted. Not vainly had she wetted her pillow with tears, and sobbed herself to sleep. Then that sound that Cesare noticed once or twice, when they were talking on the balcony—that sound as of some one lurking and listening below . . . . One name rose to her lips, but she dared not utter it; one question, but she dared not ask it.

Where was 'Tonio Moretti?

When Monna Brigita was gone, she dragged herself to the window, tremblingly, heavily, as one drags along in dreams; and there—although it was now nearly eight o'clock—there in its accustomed corner stood Moretti's vettura.

The other men had cleaned their carriages, and put their horses to, and driven away long since. The women had filled their cans, and gone about their household duties. Maria, the serving-maid, was running to and fro with hot dishes between the kitchen and the Trattoria. The landlord and a country carter were busy loading a carretta with empty wine-barrels. The children were whooping and racing about the yard; the cocks and hens were scratching over the rubbish heaps; the daily life of the place was going on, just as though no dread unknown thing happened but a few hours before. The only unusual feature in this familiar scene (unusual, that is to say, at so late an hour of the day) was 'Tonio Moretti's vettura.

The yard was generally clear by half-past six; at latest, by seven; and 'Tonio, as a rule, was one of the first up and about. But there stood the vettura with closed blinds and empty shafts, all splashed and muddy

from yesterday's driving; and yonder, through the open doorway, she could hear the uneasy stamping and whinnying of his horses, waiting for their morning feed, and wondering why their master neglected them.

Where was 'Tonio Moretti?

In after years, Giulietta Beni could never recall that day's agony and suspense without a shudder. Somehow or another, by force of habit, as it were, and half unconsciously, she went through her ordinary household duties; but to sit down calmly to embroider when these were done, was impossible! She could only walk restlessly to and fro, listening, watching, wringing her hands.

When Stefano Beni came home at midday, she met him on the threshold.

"Uncle," she said, "my Cesare is dead or dying. That was his blood; and 'Tonio Moretti is his murderer."

Her cheeks were white; her hands were like fire; her voice sounded hard and strange.

Startled and alarmed, the wheelwright strove in vain to calm her.

"It is of no use," she said. "There stands 'Tonio's vettura. It has stood there all the morning. His horses are starving in the stable—there is no one to feed them. He is afraid to come near the place. His hands are red—he dares not show them! The brand of Cain is on his brow."

"But I tell you it is all folly!" remonstrated the wheelwright.

"Lina Pezzi picked up the dagger!"

"Lina Pezzi picked up a bit of broken blade with no blood on it. Now, in the name of reason, my little girl . . . . ."

"Reason!" she cried, holding her head wildly with both hands. "Don't talk to me of reason! Find out the truth for me, or I shall go mad!"

Then Stefano Beni, being fairly at his wits' end, promised to do what he could—to go round to 'Tonio Moretti's lodging; to make enquiry at the police-bureau and at both hospitals; to do anything, everything, if she would only try to be patient. So the poor child promised patience, and kissed him with a look that sent him down stairs with the tears in his eyes; and when he was gone, she went to her room, and poured out her heart in prayer and petition to "Our Lady of Sorrow."

When he came back some three hours later, the vettura was no longer in the yard. Ernesto Moretti, 'Tonio's cousin who lived down by the Porta Canossa, had been round meanwhile, paid an indemnity of a week's rent, and fetched the carriage and both horses away.

"We were the best friends in the world!" said the landlord, in astonishment. "I've stabled his beasts for two years; he has had his dinner at our Trattoria pretty nearly every day; and we have never had a word of difference. I cannot understand it. But ecco! it is the way of the world!"

"Ay, neighbour," echoed Stefano Beni; "it is the way of the world!"

But he chuckled softly to himself as he went up the stairs.

The door opened before he reached his own landing. She had been listening for his footfall; but now that he had come, she could not speak.

"Cheer up, my little girl!" he said, coming quickly

in, and shutting the door behind him. "Cheer up! all is well—it is 'Tonio who is in trouble—it was 'Tonio's blood that was spilt, and not our Signore Capitano's! The poor brute is in bed, and a surgeon attending him. I saw his landlady. He tells her he met with an accident last night; but he seems to have been drubbed within an inch of his life. His face and head, she says, are one mass of bruises—three or four of his front teeth knocked out—and his eyes swollen up as big as a couple of oranges. He won't be able to see—much less to get up—for a week or more, the miserable devil!"

"You are sure that this is true?" she asked, breathlessly.

"Sure—positive; for after I had seen the landlady, I went on and saw the doctor. Now, are you satisfied?"

"I—I don't know," she faltered. "If I do not get a letter to-morrow morning, little uncle, you must take me to Venice."

But when morning came, the dear, welcome letter came with it. Cesare Donato was safe, and well, and very busy; and expecting to weigh anchor for Trieste in a couple of days.

CHAPTER XX.

STRANGE IF FORTUITOUS.

No; there was evidently nothing wrong with Cesare Donato. Busy as he was, he wrote daily, though briefly, from Venice; and from Trieste despatched a letter written during the trip from port to port. The letters were plain, straightforward letters enough; not high-flown, like love-letters in romances; but simple, and earnest, and full of manly tenderness. Such news as they contained was purely about business. At Venice, everything reminded him of the happy day they had spent there together. It was especially delightful to him to remember that she had been on board the *Diamante*. She was now associated with the vessel in his mind for ever. He could recall her as she looked, as she spoke; on deck; in the saloon; even in his own little cabin and counting-house. It enabled him to realize the happiness that would hereafter be his, when her presence there should be not a dream, not a remembrance, but a blissful reality. It was his consolation, being parted from her, to know that each sunset brought that happy future one day nearer. Then he told her how at Venice he had shipped an unusually heavy cargo, the greater part of which would be immediately discharged at Trieste; while at Trieste, he was about to take in goods for delivery at Ancona, Barletta, Bari, Zante, and Smyrna. It had been his intention to go direct from Trieste to Bari, and thence to make straight for Smyrna. But man proposes and trade disposes; and these new commissions, besides

delaying his arrival at Bari till the middle or end of the following week, would add a fortnight or three weeks to his outward journey.

Such was the substance of his first letters. He told her in each of them that he was well—quite well—never better; repeating the statement so often and so emphatically, that a less unsophisticated correspondent might have suspected it to be written with a motive.

La Giulietta, however, had no such suspicion; and her content was absolute. That there had been an affray of some kind that night under the gateway of the Osteria del Cappello was certain; and that 'Tonio Moretti had come to grief in that affray was no less certain. But that Cesare Donato was unhurt—not only unhurt, but entirely unaware of what had there taken place—was now quite evident.

If it had been *his* blood!

This was the thought that crossed her mind, whenever she passed the spot. There was no faintest stain or trace left upon the stones; but she could not look on them without shuddering.

If it had been his blood! If he had been found there in the morning, stark and white, with that knife-blade in his heart! Or if, mortally wounded, he had been carried away, to die soon after in the nearest hospital! And if 'Tonio Moretti's hand had done the deed! . . . .

The girl's heart was heavy with remorse when she remembered how quick she had been to assume the commission of a deadly crime, and to fix it upon an innocent man. She was, for the time, as sure of the fact as if she had seen the blow aimed, and her lover

bleeding at her feet. And oh! the storms of rebellious despair, of passionate hatred, that shook her very soul that terrible morning, while she waited, waited, waited for her Uncle Stefano's return! With shame and sorrow she remembered those sinful moments. Not till she should have confessed all to Padre Anselmo; not till she should have performed some just and fitting penance, could she feel innocent and happy again.

Following the letter penned at sea, there next came one written in harbour at Trieste; written, too, in characters so curiously cramped that La Giulietta did not at first sight recognize her lover's handwriting. The opening lines explained the cause of these crabbed hieroglyphs. Donato had hurt his right hand, and could with difficulty hold a pen. Heedless of the inconvenience, he had gone on using the hand for some days; but it now had become so swollen and so stiff that he feared his writing would be scarcely legible. He did not tell her how he came by the injury; but he so wrote about it that she concluded it to be a sprain, or a bruise, brought on by handling heavy goods while the vessel was lading at Venice.

The next letter consisted of only three lines. His hand had been dressed by a surgeon, and was now bound up; so that to write was all but impossible. He was, in fact, forbidden to use it. Except as regarded this luckless hand, he was well; and, as usual, very busy.

Then came two days of silence, followed by a pencilled word, evidently written with extreme difficulty, in which he told her that he was just about to weigh anchor for Ancona.

At first, the girl had thought lightly enough of

Donato's accident. A daughter of the people, she had not been so softly reared as that she should fret because her lover chanced to sprain a wrist, or bruise a finger. She would have been ashamed to take alarm at so trifling a mischance. But now, as day after day went by, she began to feel vaguely uneasy.

"I cannot think why his hand does not get well, little uncle!" she said, going back to the subject for the third or fourth time since Stefano Beni had come home from work.

The wheelwright, smoking his after-supper pipe, shrugged his shoulders by way of answer.

"It has been going on for eight—nine—ten days; and getting worse instead of better."

"Ay; but those things, you know, are slow to cure."

"Those things!" she repeated, quickly. "What things? He has never thought to tell me how it happened! I should feel easier if I knew exactly what was the matter."

"Nay, my little girl; I think you are worrying yourself about nothing," said old Stefano, kindly. "Our Signor Capitano is not one to take notice of a trifle."

"It may have been a trifle at the beginning; but is it a trifle now? Remember Gaetano Alberi!"

(Gaetano Alberi was a young cooper's apprentice, who had once upon a time lodged in the Osteria del Cappello.)

"That is not a case in point, my little girl. The lad was a beginner, and did not know how to handle his tools."

"But it shows how a trifle may end. Everyone said it was nothing at all—a mere scratch! But his

arm swelled and turned black; and his teeth became fixed; and the poor boy died of starvation!"

"That was from a wound, child! He contrived to cut through some muscle in his hand; and the place gangrened, and it brought on lockjaw. Who ever heard of lockjaw being caused by a sprain or a bruise?"

"We don't know that is a sprain or a bruise. It may be a wound!" she said, shudderingly.

"Not likely!"

"Not likely, do you say? You forget that 'Lina Pezzi never found the other half of that knife."

The wheelwright took his pipe from his mouth. He looked startled.

"Per Bacco!"

Till this moment, he had never seriously connected Cesare Donato with that midnight scuffle under the archway. He had made certain that it was a mere vetturino's quarrel, such as they had seen among the men in the courtyard many a time already. But now, to be sure, the thing looked doubtful. There was 'Tonio Morretti's battered condition on the one hand; there was Cesare Donato's accident on the other. As regarded time and place, the coincidence was strange, if fortuitous. The motive, again, would not be far to seek. Jealousy, opportunity, vengeance—no element of plot or passion was wanting! Therefore Stefano Beni's incredulity was at last shaken. Therefore he took his pipe from his lips, and exclaimed—"Per Bacco!"

Then, talking it over with his niece, he counselled La Giulietta to press her lover for the facts, and to tell him everything. By "everything," he meant all about 'Tonio Moretti's courtship and rejection; all about

that broken knife-blade, and those pools of blood under the gateway.

"If he cannot use his hand," said the wheelwright, "he will get some one to write for him. At all events, you will then know the worst."

The advice was good; but, like good advice in general, it was hard to follow. How could La Giulietta write these things to her lover? How could she tell him that long story about 'Tonio Moretti—'Tonio the beaten, the battered, the rejected, of whom Cesare Donato knew not even so much as his name? It would be ungenerous, and she could not do it.

But she nevertheless wrote a letter that evening, when her uncle was gone to bed. In this letter, with such insistence as her love and her fervid native tongue inspired, she entreated Donato to let her know exactly how he came by his accident; above all, to tell her if it was a "cut-wound"—for of a "cut-wound" in the hand she entertained the deadliest terror. Then, lest he should deem her anxiety baseless, she recounted the history of the lad Gaetano Alberi, telling how he had maimed his hand with an adze; and how, although the injury was at first so slight that he scarcely even thought to bind the hand up, he died at last in agony.

"He was the only son of a widow," she wrote, "and the widow lives still. She is very poor and solitary; and she shares one small attic with another old woman as poor and solitary as herself. If I lost you, Cesare my well-beloved, I should pray to the Madonna to take me to you at once—as I pray to her now to give you back to me in safety."

It was a long letter—the longest the girl had ever

written; and she sat up writing it till an hour past midnight, by the great clock in the Piazza dei Signori. She heard its iron tongue above all the church clocks of Verona.

But Cesare Donato's answer, written with almost all his accustomed freedom of pen, completely reassured her. He was now in harbour at Ancona, where he found her letter awaiting him. His hand was much better. The accident had been very slight; so slight that he should not even have mentioned it to her except as it was necessary to account for the shortness of his letters and the imperfections of the writing. As for "cut-wounds" and "lockjaws" he laughed the idea to scorn. She must banish such nervous fancies; for, in truth, nothing could be further from the facts. A little local inflammation, a little swelling, a little stiffness, and all was summed up. These symptoms had now so far abated that by the time she should receive this letter, he would have recovered the full use of his hand.

"There!" said Stefano Beni. "Did I not tell you so? If you want a downright answer, you must ask a downright question. There's nothing like plain dealing. And now, my little girl, I suppose your heart is set at rest?"

"Yes; her heart was set at rest. Once again she rejoiced in the blessed assurance of her lover's safety; once again, too, she formally acquitted 'Tonio Moretti.

And yet. . . . .

And yet, even now, Cesare Donato had not told her how he came by his accident.

CHAPTER XXI.

"FRIEND PETER."

We have seen how the winter months were spent by Lancelot Brackenbury; how, living a hermit-life among the ruins of Old Court, he drudged manfully through his multitudinous duties, and became, in very act and deed, his brother's successor. For Winifred Savage the time went by more monotonously, but, on the whole, more happily. The woman's patience, the woman's adaptability to circumstances, were hers. She found herself, as it were, landed for awhile upon a quiet plateau whence she could look back upon the years that were gone, and forward to the years that were to come. And though her burden hitherto had not been exceptionally heavy, nor her path very thickly set with thorns, yet some thorns there had been, and some weight of burden; and at all events she was weary. So, being weary, she found it good and pleasant thus to rest awhile half-way between the old life and the new.

And in what a peaceful round the days and weeks slipped by, repeating themselves like the refrain of an old-fashioned melody! There were the morning hours of art-study in Herr Krüger's atelier; the afternoon walks with Kätchen and Brenda, varied now and then, when the snow was hard, by a sleighing excursion to Schleissheim or Schwaneck; the quiet evenings given up to reading, working, and music; the cheerful meals; the simple worship at morn and even, when with a

prayer was begun, and with a hymn was ended, the labour of the day.

But Winifred's happiest hours were those which she spent in her own pretty room—that boudoir-studio, with its windows looking to the Alps, which Lancelot had furnished with all things fair and fitting for her use. Here she loved to sit, reading the books he had given to her; thinking of him; writing to him; dreaming dreams of the happy future; and enjoying a solitude that was never lonely. In that room, whichever way she turned, her eyes rested upon something either beautiful in itself, or beautiful in its association with beauty. On the walls, in plain black frames picked out with gold, hung a few good prints and etchings—the "Belle Jardinière" of Raffaelle; Michael Angelo's "Vision of Ezekiel;" Titian's "Sacred and Profane Love;" a "Coronation of the Virgin," by Fra Angelico; Albert Dürer's "Saint Jerome in his Study;" Turner's "Little Devil's Bridge" and "Norham Castle" from the Liber Studiorum. For sculpture, there was a cast of the Venus of Melos, in half life-size; a reduction of the Torso of the Belvedere, colossal even in miniature; the well-known bust of Augustus in the bloom of his beautiful and serious boyhood; the pathetic head of Germanicus; a mask of the Jupiter of Otricoli; and a cast of the terrible right hand of Michael Angelo's "Moses." So much for the art that ennobled that homely upstairs room. For music, there was a little white-wood cottage piano of Zurich make, and a pile of small volumes lettered Mozart, Haydn, Mendelssohn, Beethoven, Schubert. For reading, a tiny book-case stocked with such books as Lancelot was sure she either loved already, or would love when she knew

them. Shakespeare first; then Milton, Spenser, Wordsworth; Homer and Plato in translations; Bacon's and Macaulay's Essays; some of Hazlitt, some of De Quincey, some of Leigh Hunt; Schlegel's "Dramatic Literature;" Sir Joshua Reynold's "Discourses;" Flaxman's "Lectures on Sculpture;" and the first two volumes (being all yet published) of a work called "Modern Painters," about which there was beginning to be much talk just now in the literary and artistic world. When to this catalogue are added the names of those old friends whom Winifred had brought with her from The Grange—Dante, Ariosto, White's "Selborne," Longfellow's "Hyperion," Tennyson's "In Memoriam," and Lane's translation of "The Arabian Nights"—it will be seen that she was sufficiently independent of Pastor Kreutzmann's learned shelves downstairs. Then, besides her prints and her casts and her books, there was an easel for her use, when she should be disposed to work at home; a writing-table, a reading-desk, a lamp; chairs and a couch covered with shining chintz; the inevitable German stove up in one corner; and on a bracket between the windows, an elaborately carved Swiss clock, like an Oberland chalet, inhabited by the liveliest and most punctual of wooden cuckoos.

There are few pleasanter tasks than that of guiding the footsteps of one whom we dearly love; and Lancelot, while surrounding her with beautiful things, was in fact forming Winifred's taste in many matters of which till now she had known little or nothing. Her scanty education, and the profound retirement in which her three-and-twenty years of life had been spent, excluded her of necessity from the world of Art. She

heard no music at Langtrey Grange; she saw no pictures; she had access to only a few books. And yet she was not ignorant. The books were few; but it was surprising how much she had got out of them. It has often been said that to know one good book, and to know it thoroughly, is worth all the slight acquaintance with all the light literature in the world. Now Winifred Savage's few books were of the best. She knew some of them—Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton—pretty nearly by heart; and to be fast friends with any one of these three is in itself a liberal education.

She owed her intimacy with Milton to the classic taste of old Lord Brackenbury, in whose estimation "the poet blind yet bold" stood second to none but Homer. He was wont to say that he regarded the appreciation or non-appreciation of "Lycidas" as the crucial test of a man's ability to enjoy poetry of the highest order; and he made it his especial care so to educate Miss Savage's taste that she should not only feel the majesty of Milton's "mighty line" in "Paradise Lost," but that she should also be sensible of the learned pathos of his Doric elegy. Her copy of Milton was one of his many gifts, and it bore her name in his handwriting on the fly-leaf. For her knowledge of Dante, on the other hand, she was indebted to Cuthbert Brackenbury's rare Italian scholarship. At one time, while as yet their engagement was tacitly understood rather than formally ratified, Winifred used quite regularly to read and analyse, with the young man's help, a page or two of the "Divina Commedia" every Wednesday afternoon; that being the day on which he was wont to pay his weekly visit at The Grange.

These analytical readings led to the loan of many books from the library at Brackenbury Court; and Winifred, before she was seventeen, had read, or at all events skimmed, the majority of Guicciardini's twenty, and Sismondi's sixteen, volumes; to say nothing of Hallam and other writers on mediæval literature.

So much for her Milton and her Dante. These came to her, as "the gifts of fortune," from without; but her Shakespeare, like reading and writing, seemed to come "by nature." It was, at all events, a home-found treasure. In the bottom of a dark and dusty cupboard in a little ground-floor room where the old Squire, Winifred's grandfather, was wont erewhile to keep his accounts, his fishing tackle, his pipes, tobacco, whips, spurs, ammunition, top-boots, and a miscellaneous collection of foxes' brushes, stuffed birds, and the like, she one day found a precious store of long-forgotten books—some odd volumes of the "Tatler" and "Spectator," Boswell's "Life of Johnson," a bundle of early numbers of "The Gentleman's Magazine," a much-thumbed Walton and Cotton's "Compleat Angler," and a battered copy of the Second Folio of Shakespeare, dated 1632. It was such a shabby old book, so worm-eaten, dog-eared and cropped, that it was a wonder it had not long since gone to light the fires, or old Squire Langtrey's pipes.

The margins, too, were scribbled all over in places with childish pencillings; while here and there, laid carefully away between the leaves, were scraps of ancient newspaper cuttings, and receipts for the making of frumenty, syllabubs, and such other dainties, written in faint brown ink by the hand of some good house-

wife of perhaps more than a century ago. The book, however, was very nearly perfect. It wanted only a page or two at the end, and half the title. The rare old portrait was there; and Ben Johnson's verses on the opposite leaf were not missing.

Lord Brackenbury, when he found his coal, was not richer than Winifred Savage when she unearthed that dilapidated Shakespeare. It may, indeed, be doubted if the possession of the coal ever gave to any of its successive owners one tithe of the delight and enjoyment with which the lonely child (then little more than nine years of age) found herself suddenly landed on Prospero's enchanted isle, threading the green thickets of the Forest of Arden, listening to the hammering of the armourers in the camp at Agincourt, and to the melancholy wash of the waves where Timon lay "entomb'd upon the very hem o' the sea." For years—that is to say, up to the time when the great feud was healed, and books from Brackenbury Court began to find their way to Langtrey Grange—that volume represented her whole stock of imaginative literature. Story-books, poetry-books, picture-books, she had none. While other girls of her age were reading Miss Edgeworth and Johanna Baillie, Winifred Savage was deep in Macbeth and King Lear.

Thus it came to pass that she was very well-read and very ill-educated. She could analyse Dante, but her ignorance of decimals was appalling; and she knew nothing of "dancing, deportment, and the use of the globes."

Though not, perhaps, quite duly sensible of the enormity of these shortcomings, the girl worked hard all through that winter in Munich. German she ac-

quired, almost without being aware of it; and although it is not given to even a heaven-born genius to master the methods of Art in three months, she at all events learned to express rounded form in outline, and penetrated the mysteries of light, tone, and shadow. Above all, she acquired the invaluable art of seeing correctly; an art which most people fancy they possess, but which is in truth as rare as that of right thinking.

For some weeks, Herr Krüger set his new pupil to draw from casts; and it was not till the crocuses lifted their yellow and purple heads above the snow in his neglected garden, that he one day put a lump of clay and some modelling tools before her, and bade her try to copy Michael Angelo's mask of a satyr. For this attempt she got some praise, which on Herr Krüger's lips was not common.

"Go on as you have begun," he said "and you may compete at the Kunst-Verein next autumn."

Her fellow-students marvelled that, being thus encouraged, the young Engländerinn only looked pleased, and was silent.

"Had the master said that to me, I should have kissed his hand and wept for joy!" said one.

"She did not utter a word!" exclaimed another.

"Ach, Himmel! these English are as cold as ice and as proud as Lucifer!" chimed in a third.

But Winifred knew that long enough before the time for that autumn competition should come round, she would have ceased to occupy an easel in Herr Krüger's studio.

And thus the winter and the early spring passed peacefully and profitably by. A happy time, barren

of incident, rich in culture, fruitful in promise! Once, and only once, did anything happen worthy to be called an "event;" and that was when a plain open carriage drove up one bleak afternoon in March, and set down two gentlemen at the artist's door. They came, apparently, to inspect the class.

One of these gentlemen was very deaf and fussy, and had an ear-splitting voice and a big knob on his forehead. The other—(Winifred became crimson when she saw him)—was that same, that very same, little old gentleman who had, on a certain never-to-be-forgotten occasion, emerged so inopportunely from behind a big tree by the riverside in the Englischer Garten. He looked as bright-eyed and shrivelled-up as ever, and wore the same scrap of ribbon in his button-hole.

When the class-room door was thrown open and Herr Krüger appeared, ushering in the visitors, the students rose as by a common impulse. But the deaf gentleman shook his head, and protested impatiently.

"No, no, no," he said. "No stopping! no stopping! I like to see them at work!"

Herr Krüger made a sign, and all resumed their seats. These were evidently visitors of some distinction —Art-inspectors, perhaps; or, at all events, persons occupying some official position. Whoever, or whatever, they might be, Winifred was thankful to shrink down before her easel, and hide her face over her work.

Meanwhile the strangers went round; the deaf gentleman stopping for a moment here and there, criticising freely and talking incessantly.

"What have we here—head of Laocoon? Humph! nose too short—corner of mouth not sufficiently drawn

down. Try again! try again! And this—'Wingless Victory'? So! Bas-relief very difficult. More difficult than round—eh, Herr Krüger? Not bad, however—not bad! Several new faces since I was here last, Herr Krüger. And who is this little maiden—Von Braun? What Von Braun, eh? The Von Brauns of Partenkirchen? Good—good. Drawing hands and feet, eh? Quite right. Beginners must go upon all-fours before they try to walk! And the Fräulein in black, yonder?"

Herr Krüger hastened to reply.

"Fräulein Savage, your Majesty—a young English lady who is passing the winter in Munich."

But His Majesty heard not a word of the answer.

"What name?" he shouted, impatiently. "What name? Where from? Eh? eh? What—English? Why didn't you say so at first? Very pretty, very pretty. A head for one of your Dianas or Uranias, eh, friend Peter?"

And, passing his arm familiarly round the neck of the little old gentleman with the ribbon, His Majesty shuffled on, serenely unconscious that his hearers were not deaf, and that he was himself as deaf as a post.

Winifred at once recognised this eccentric specimen of Royalty. She had heard too much of his bluntness, his oddities, and his deafness, not to be quite sure that she was in the august presence of the ex-King, Ludwig the First. But then who was the bright-eyed old gentleman of the Englischer Garten? Who was "Friend Peter"?

"What! Don't you know?" exclaimed the damsel who was copying the head of Laocoon. "Why, that is Peter von Cornelius!"

This was when their Royal visitor had gone on to Herr Krüger's private studio; a detached room at the farther end of the garden.

"Do you mean the Cornelius who painted the frescoes of the Glyptothek?" asked Winifred, innocently.

"I mean the great Cornelius, Fräulein Winifred," said the Bavarian girl, with immense dignity. "There is but one Cornelius—as there is but one Michael Angelo. But have you not met him before? He bowed as if he knew you."

Winifred did not think it necessary to reply to this question.

Such was the one "event" which marked the placid course of her winter studies in Munich. In the meanwhile, however, as the spring came on, the time for Lancelot's return drew nearer. He was to come at Easter; and Easter would fall towards the end of April. This by and by resolved itself into a definite date. He decided to leave Old Court for London on the 17th of the month, and after spending a couple of days in town, to cross from Dover on the 20th. She might therefore expect to see him on the evening of the 21st.

From the moment when these dates were finally fixed, the intervening weeks seemed to melt away faster than the last hoar frosts of spring before the sun.

CHAPTER XXII.

AT LAST!

WINIFRED SAVAGE, sojourning North of the Alps and devoting her last months of "maiden meditation" to such self-culture as should enable her more fully to enter into her future husband's pursuits and tastes, was far less lonely than a certain other damsel in whose joys and sorrows we here are equally concerned. Dwelling also within sight of those snowy battlements, also parted from her lover and waiting his return to claim her hand, that other maiden found the wintry weeks and months drag heavily by.

In its main lines, the position of these two girls was precisely parrallel; but those lines lay wide apart —wider by far than even that frozen zone of snow and ice which divided Munich from Verona. Giulietta Beni, humbly born and simply taught, had scantier resources and more anxities than Winifred Savage. Cesare Donato's letters were fewer and farther between than Lancelot Brackenbury's; and if now and then, when posted from the same port, some three or four came to hand in quick succession, there were oftener intervals of prolonged silence during which she suffered enough of anxiety and suspense.

Except inasmuch as she loved summer better than winter, and sunshine better than rain, La Giulietta had hitherto regarded such trifles as wind and weather with all the indifference of youth and perfect health. But now her heart sank when she read of gales at sea; and if the wind blustered at night about the housetops, she would lie wakeful and trembling till dawn of day.

"Have you any book about the sea, good Signor Scalchi?" she would ask, lingering on market-mornings at Il Grillo's book-stall in the Piazza dei Signori.

And then Il Grillo, accustomed to the frequent question, would rummage among his stores and bring out some odd volume or other:—"The Discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus;" or "A True Account of Various Attempts to Reach the North Pole;" or "A Whaling Cruise off the Coast of Newfoundland;" or perhaps "A School History of the Maritime Republics of Genoa and Venice."

Poring over such narratives as these—narratives dry and dull enough, for the most part—the girl's head became filled with vague terrors of shipwrecks, icebergs, south-sea islanders, pirates, and "all the perils and dangers of the deep."

It was no wonder if, brooding upon these things, her thoughts were heavy with apprehension by day, and her dreams were troubled by night. It was no wonder that the neighbours no longer heard her singing over her embroidery when, even in December, the sun lay warm upon her balcony at midday.

The time, meanwhile, dragged by. Christmas came with its accustomed ceremonies and pomps; and La Giulietta, devoting herself as usual to her good friends and former teachers, the Carmelite nuns in the Via della Scala, helped to decorate their little chapel with winter greenery, and to dress the tables for the feast which, at this season of love and charity, the pious sisters gave every year to the poor children of their district.

Cesare Donato passed his Christmas at Bari. The house, he wrote, was all disorder. There were painters

at work in almost every room, and carpenters putting up a verandah along the terrace-front looking to the sea. In this verandah, which commanded a magnificent view of the town, the harbour, and the distant Albanian Mountains, he hoped that his Giulietta would spend many of her happiest hours. He begged her, in this same letter, to tell "Uncle Stefano" that his wishes regarding the purchase of a piece of land were not forgotten. But land was scarce at Bari; and not only scarce but dear. He had seen nothing, up to the present time, that was not either too far from the Villa Donato, or in some other way unsuitable. In his next letter, however, written a day or two later, he reported on a prospect of better luck. A capital bit of ground adjoining his own vineyard, though not for sale, might possibly be purchaseable. A better bit of ground for Stefano Beni's purpose could not be imagined. It had, in fact, once formed a part of Donato's own property; but had by him been sold to his friend Canon Alassio, who had again sold it to one Prospero of Bari. If Prospero could be brought to part from it, all would be well. Canon Alassio, at all events, was interesting himself in the matter, and with some hope of success.

A week later, and the bargain was concluded. Four acres and a half on a fertile hill-side looking to the south-east, and divided from Donato's own vineyard by a low stone fence, were to become the wheelwright's freehold property upon the payment of a sum that amounted, after all, to less than he had expected. La Giulietta's lover wrote this good news on the eve of his own departure for Zante; but he left the settlement of the affair in good hands. His lawyer, a cer-

tain Signor Gioja of Bari, had already examined the title-deeds, and would, in the course of a few days, forward the necessary papers for signature to Verona. Donato, meanwhile, had lodged with Canon Alassio a sum sufficient to cover the expenses of purchase and transfer. "The little uncle" could repay him by and by, when he came back from sea.

And so the dream of Stefano Beni's life was at last realised; but neither he nor his niece Giulietta ever knew the true and full history of those four-and-a-half acres, or dreamed that the whole set of transactions, including three separate sales and all the documentary work therewith connected, had occupied less than ten days. This was a fact known only to the lawyer who drew up the deeds, and to the contracting parties who signed them. As for the worthy man whom Donato had designated as "one Prospero," he had, in fact, been gardener and stable-help to Canon Alassio for nearly forty years. Understanding little or nothing of the transactions to which he was a legal party, he only did as he was bidden, and received a gratuity of a hundred lire for his trouble. Never, in short, was pious fraud more legally and skilfully perpetrated.

And now that her love had sailed away into far and foreign waters, La Giulietta felt lonelier than ever. So long as the friendly shores of the Adriatic Gulf sheltered the good bark *Diamante*, it had seemed to her that Donato was near home and in safety. But his letters now became fewer, and she knew that each day bore him further from her. Upon a little set of well-thumbed maps which she bought about this time at Il Grillo's stall, she followed the track of the *Dia-*

mante from port to port, from shore to shore; puzzling anxiously over the hard names along the coasts of Greece and Asia Minor, and wondering why it was that places which looked so near together should take so long to reach.

His first letter on leaving Bari was written at sea, and posted at Argostoli, in Cephalonia; the next was despatched from Zante; the next from Patras. Delayed by baffling winds, he then beat about the Gulf of Patras for some days, before starting with a change of wind for the Greek Archipelago. Then came a longer silence, followed by letters dated from Syra and the Piræus. Again the wind had been contrary, and the *Diamante* had had hard work to make Cape Malea, the most southerly point of the Morea. The weather, however, had been splendid, and the ship had been followed one day by a school of dolphins. Donato described to her how these lithe and fearless creatures played about the vessel, leaping and diving and chasing each other above and under the blue waters; cleaving the waves; scattering the spray; and springing all wet and glittering through the sunny upper air, as if they took the ship for some "sea-shouldering whale," to be sported with and feared not.

After a few busy days at the Piræus, during which he found time to write twice to his little Giulietta, Donato set sail for Smyrna, and there ran the *Diamante* into port after an easy run of twenty-four hours. He had now reached the farthest point of his voyage. When next he weighed anchor, it would be to set his face towards home, touching only at Zante by the way, and making straight for Trieste. Then each

day's work would bring him so many miles the nearer to his love.

And now he was once more at sea, and unless he posted a letter to her from Zante, she could not hear from him again before his arrival at Trieste. That Zante letter, when it came, was brief and hurried. The *Diamante* had fallen in with rough weather between Milo and Cerigo. One of her boats had been carried away by a heavy sea, and they had lost a mizen-mast during the gale. This loss of the mizen-mast sounded very terrible; almost as terrible as shipwreck.

Since the beginning of this new year, the girl had ceased to work at her trade; and instead of embroidering vestments and altar-cloths for her employers at the ecclesiastical warehouse in the Via San Spirito, had devoted her whole time to the preparation of her marriage outfit. Her notions as regarded that outfit were the notions of the class in which she had been born and bred. Ribbons and laces and things of outward adornment were probably as attractive to her in a shop-window as to Lota and Lisa and other girls of her own age; but like a true daughter of the people, her first thought was of bringing to her husband's home a goodly store of personal and household linen. The beginning of that store (once part of her mother's dowry) she already possessed. But now it was her ambition to add to it in such proportion as became the bride of a man in Donato's rank of life. To this end, she plied her busy needle day by day.

Winifred Savage, on the other hand (unskilled in purchasing, and unlearned in matters of dress and fashion), had recourse to Mrs. Pennefeather's superior

wisdom. Stipulating only that her trousseau should be "good, simple, and sufficient," she commissioned that faithful friend to order for her all that was necessary and proper to the occasion. And it was a task after Mrs. Pennefeather's own heart. Revelling in vicarious purple and fine linen, she plunged with infinite relish into a Maelström of millinery; filled enormous letters two or three times a week with most excellent discourse of frillings, quillings, edgings, insertions, and the like; and showed herself competent to deal with even such intricate questions as the relative merits of Mechlin and Valenciennes.

The brief sharp Lombard winter had meanwhile spent itself in one or two heavy snow-falls; and then, quite suddenly, there was springtime in Verona. The meadows down by the Adige became flooded with golden buttercups; and the woods were filled with a soft sweet odour of hyacinths; and the Piazza delle Erbe on market-mornings looked like one huge parterre of daffodils, jonquils, narcissus, primroses, almond-blossoms, and violets purple and white. But the early season, though rich in flowers, was boisterous and stormy; rough blasts from Alpine fastnesses raking the seaward plains, and fiercely rocking the cradled buds of spring. Those Tramontana winds, blowing from the North-West for three successive weeks, poured down the Adriatic Gulf, and set dead against all vessels homeward bound. During these three weeks, La Giulietta received not a line from her lover at sea.

She told herself that she must be patient; that a sailor's wife must strive against vain terrors; that winds and waves were alike obedient to the Will that ruled the Universe; and that the *Diamante*, battling

against head-winds, was in truth as safe under God's providence as though she lay at anchor in the roads of Trieste.

And yet how hard it was to wait and trust!

There were days when an unconquerable restlessness possessed her—a restlessness not to be appeased by the repeating of many Aves or the burning of many tapers. Sometimes, when she could endure it no longer, she would throw down her sewing, and go to the Piazza Brà, and wander about the lonely Amphitheatre till she was tired. It was a place endeared to her by many memories; above all, by the memory of her first meeting with Cesare Donato. In this embrasure they lingered; down these stairs he followed her; at that door they said "Farewell!" Another weed was now growing in the crevice from which he had gathered that wild-flower. She almost felt as if she must see his upturned face, when she looked over the parapet!

At length there came an evening when suspense itself seemed weary, and was succeeded by the very lassitude of hopelessness. There had been a wild night followed by a day of storms; but now, as evening fell, the sky cleared, and the moon rose in splendour.

"The wind has shifted to the south, my little girl," said old Stefano, putting on his coat before sitting down to supper. "We shall hear of the *Diamante* at Trieste to-morrow."

La Giulietta, without replying, placed a bowl of jonquils in the middle of the table; altered the position of the lamp; and, passing behind the old man's chair, gently kissed his cheek, and went out upon the balcony.

Had the wind really shifted? Yes; it had really shifted. Scarcely a breath stirred; yet the sweetness and softness of the south were on the air. All was very still. The moon had not yet risen into sight; but the sky was full of light, and one large planet glowed with a soft, vibrating radiance just above the house-tops.

Was it thus calm at sea? Ah, no! The waves, she told herself, were still rolling heavily out yonder in the storm-swept gulf, and washing their wreckage to shore. Their wreckage . . . Ah, sweet Lady of Grace! what a word was that!

"Come, my little girl," called her uncle, tapping his glass with his knife; "don't you want any supper?"

"Presently, dear little uncle—presently!"

How still it was, and how the light came streaming up the east! The moon must soon climb above yonder dark parapet. There was no moon the night he went away. How well she remembered every word of that long talk upon the balcony, when he told her of the beautiful far-away islands fringed with palms; and of that northern shore where the sun shone at midnight! How well—alas, how well!—she remembered the last echo of his footfall as he went down the stairs.

And next morning there were those mysterious pools of blood . . . How dark it looked under that murderous gateway!

It echoed at that moment to a footstep. Then, emerging from under the arch, a man advanced quickly into the yard.

She uttered a trembling cry.

"Cesare!"

He stood still—he looked straight up at the balcony—he crossed the yard, as it seemed to her, at a single bound.

Separation, suspense, terror, waiting, all were over. In another minute she was clasped in his arms; sobbing on his breast.

"At last, my love!—at last!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THEIR MARRIAGE DAY.

The sun has set; the evening gun has gone; but it is still daylight in the Piazza San Marco. The great square, always full at this hour, is fuller than usual to-day; for last Sunday was Easter Sunday, and this is Easter week, and the good people of Venice are making holiday. The Grand Canal and the Lagunes have been thronged all day with gondolas, most of which have discarded the tufted *felse* for gay awnings, striped and fringed and many-coloured; for, though we are but midway through April, the sun burns fiercely during eight hours of the twenty-four, and the beautiful water-city has already begun to put on its summer aspect. But now the boats lie thickly moored along the landing-places, and all the world is crowding to the Piazza. Here are ladies in their gayest toilets; dandies with their fans and parasols; swarthy sailors with huge earrings in their brown ears; gondoliers with red sashes bound about their waists; water-carriers; street-porters; fisher-folk from the islands; country-folk from the mainland; and itinerant vendors of flowers, sweetmeats, cigars, allumettes, and lemonade. Every-

where there are people walking, sitting, loitering, smoking, chatting, and making merry. The chairs in the Giardino Reale and the seats in front of the cafés are all occupied. Even the basement steps of the pillars of the Lion and Saint Theodore are full of loungers.

There is a movement presently in the direction of the Piazetta, the crowd dividing to make way for the band, which marches briskly to the centre of the square. Here the white-coated players form themselves into a circle with their conductor in the midst; and begin playing the overture to *Don Pasquale*.

At the first crash of that well-known allegro, some three or four gentlemen rise from their seats outside the Café Florian, and walk away. Chairs being scarce just now, there is a rush for these vacant places, which are at once re-occupied.

A lady and gentleman, ensconced at a little table in the shelter of one of the columns of the adjoining café, are spectators of this incident.

"Did you see that?" whispers the lady to her companion.

"Did I see what, carina?"

"Those gentlemen—they went away the moment the music began. And there go two more! They must hate music!"

And she looks after them with large, innocent, wondering brown eyes.

"No; it is not the music that they hate. It is the players."

"The players! What have the players done?"

"I will tell you presently—when this piece is over."

She is very young; apparently not more than seventeen or eighteen years of age; very pretty; very simply

dressed in plain dark silk, with a curious collar of flexible wrought silver round her throat, and on her head a little white bonnet. She keeps her veil down, and sits shyly back in the shade of the pillar. Her companion—tall, bronzed, auburn-bearded, in suit of navy blue with anchor buttons—is probably some ten or fifteen years her senior. They are Cesare and Giulietta.

The band plays on, surrounded by the chattering crowd:—chattering, restless, ever shifting, noisiest when the music is loudest, and only hushed for a few moments when "Com' è gentil" is taken up as a solo by the cornet.

Then presently the jerky allegro, working up, like a common-place galop, ever faster and louder, with crash of cymbals and braying of trombones, brings the performance to an end.

"Now I will tell you why those men went away, carina. They went away, I think, because yonder musicians are Austrians, wearing the Austrian uniform; and because there are still some few Venetians who cannot forget that Venice was once a free Italian republic. I have been here many a time when every well-dressed man and woman sitting outside these Cafés got up and walked out of the Piazza as soon as the band walked in. But then, of course, no festa was going on. To-day it is different. You cannot expect a crowd of holiday-makers to think of anything but pleasure."

"Because they are Austrians, wearing the uniform!"

"Is that a new idea to you? The white coats are thick enough in Verona, anyhow. Surely they are as

unpopular there as here?—or are the Veronese less thin-skinned than the Venetians?"

"I—I do not know," she answers, hesitatingly. "I never thought about it. They have always been there, you know."

"Ah, that is just it! The wrong is so old that it has almost become right! Did you never understand, child, that you were born and bred under an alien rule? Did your uncle never teach you to hate the foreign despots? No?—well, then, I who am no Lombard, I tell you that these Austrians are here as masters. Does that make you blush? I tell you, their taxation is simply the levying of tribute-money. These very coins in which I am about to pay for our coffee —this Austrian zwanziger, and these Austrian lire—are badges of servitude imposed upon a subject people. But there! It is neither the time nor the place in which to talk politics."

The band at this moment begins again; leading off with a long crescendo roll upon the side-drums.

The girl half rises from her seat.

"Let us go!" she says, in an agitated whisper. "I would rather not hear them play any more."

A close gondola waits for them down by the steps near the Giardino Reale; and thither, threading their way slowly through the crowd, they now go, arm in arm.

"To the Lido."

It is their wedding day. This morning, very early, the civil ceremony was performed at the Prefettura in Verona; after which they drove out to Montorio, a little antique walled town some six or seven miles from the city, where they were married according to the rites

of the Church by Padre Anselmo, priest of that parish. It was a wedding without bridesmaids, without music, without strewing of flowers, or ringing of bells, or gay doings of any kind. Stefano Beni and the notary-public of Montorio signed their names as witnesses; and only a few of the villagers, attracted by the rumour of a wedding in the parish church, were lookers-on during the ceremony. Then followed a simple breakfast at the good priest's house; and by-and-by the newly-wedded pair came on by train to Venice. Old Stefano, who was to meet them at Bari three weeks hence, then went back to Verona, to dispose of his business, and prepare for a new life in a new place.

And now the lovers are gliding over the shining waters, alone with their happiness and each other. How beautiful are the black-framed pictures seen through the open door of the gondola! How they change with every turn of the prow! How magical is the light! The afterglow has faded; and yet it is not dusk. Every brick in the beautiful Campanile of San Giorgio Maggiore, every leaf in the clustered tree-tops that peep above its churchyard-wall, shows more distinctly than in the blaze of noon. The serried masts of the merchant fleet at the mouth of the Giudecca stand up like lances, "rankèd ready," and the far away dome of San Pietro Castello, now coming into sight beyond the Giardini Pubblici, glows pearl-like against a background of violet shadows. Overhead, the sky is a vault of green and golden light. The lagune is a sheet of silver.

"Cesare," she whispers, "do you remember something?"

"Do I remember what, carina?"

"A promise you were to fulfil on our wedding day."

"Sweet, I have not forgotten it. I have the ring in my purse."

"The ring!—what ring?"

"You asked me for my old Abyssinian ring, when I was going away; and I refused to give you a ring of any kind till we were married."

"That is not what I mean. I had forgotten all about the ring."

"Have I made you any other promise, carina?"

"Yes, you are to tell me a secret to-day."

"A secret?"

"The secret of this scar on your forefinger. You have never yet told me how you hurt this poor disabled hand about which I was so unhappy! It was the first question I asked you when you came back from sea."

"True; and I said I would not answer it till we were married. Well, you have waited patiently, and now you shall hear the whole tragical story from beginning to end. You remember that night when I went away? It was late, and very dark . . . ."

"Ah!"

——"not so dark, however, but that I could see something—I could scarcely tell what—lurking, as it seemed to me, in the gloom of the archway. Keeping my eye upon this something, I went straight at the gateway. That instant a man sprang out upon me with a knife . . . . ."

"Dio!"

"But the blade glanced off against the book in my breast-pocket—the book you had just given me, carina—and as it slipped, I caught him by the wrist, and

tried to wrench it from his grasp. Then we had a fine struggle; and in the midst of that struggle, the blade broke. Sharp as lightning, my friend changed his tactics and clutched at my throat; so I just tripped him up, and flung him on the pavement."

"And then?"

"And then, in an unlucky moment for him, he got his teeth upon my forefinger, and bit it to the bone. Till now, I had tried only to disarm him; but when I found him hanging on like a bulldog, I confess I lost my temper."

"Oh, Cesare! what did you do?"

"Do? I will tell you what I did," says Donato, with grim humour. "I put my arm affectionately round his neck, wrenched all that was left of my finger out of his mouth, and pounded him over the head and face till I was out of breath. When at length I let him go, he fell like a log, face downwards. That frightened me. So I hauled up a bucketfull of water from the well; gave him a drenching; and got him out into the street. The poor devil could hardly speak (I believe his teeth were all down his throat!) but he contrived to make me understand where he wanted to go; so I half-dragged, half-carried him to the corner of the Via Stella, where at his own request I propped him against the wall, and left him. He may be there to this moment, for aught I know!"

"He would have murdered you!"

"Instead of which I very nearly murdered him! But what childishness is this? You tremble—your hands are like ice! My Giulietta—my darling!"

He takes her in his arms. He soothes her, as one might soothe a frightened child.

It was her book, she must remember—it was her dear old Luigi da Porta, that turned the knife aside! Only to think of that! Was he not therefore bound to love her, if possible, ten times more than ever?—to dedicate his life to her twice over? Ah, how happy he would try to make her! And what an earthly Paradise they two would make of that little white house upon the hill-side at Bari!

"Did the knife really strike the book?" she asks, shudderingly, her thoughts still dwelling on the one theme.

"I am sorry to say it has made a slit an inch long in the parchment cover, carina. But we will have it rebound in morocco—or, if you like, in velvet. And now, let us have done with the past. It is dead and buried, and not worth remembering. The present is our own, and the future lies fair before us."

"I would not have the book rebound for all the world!" she cries, passionately. "That cut is sacred. It saved your life . . . . oh, my love! my love!"

The shining water is all around them now. Venice with its domes and towers is left behind; and the long, low, amber line of the Lido is yet distant.

Donato takes out his purse, and from his purse, a ring.

"It is not so plain, dear, as the one I put upon your finger this morning."

"Oh, Cesare!—it is a ring for a Queen!"

"It is a ring for my Queen. Now let us see which little finger it fits best."

And with a kiss to each in succession, he tries it first upon one, and then upon another.

"But these, surely, are diamonds!—and this beautiful little portrait . . . . it is not meant for you?"

"They are diamonds, carina, but they are neither large nor valuable. And as for the portrait"—(here he cannot help smiling)—"well, I should have been dead some sixty or seventy years ago, if it were mine. And although that stately gentleman in the star and ribbon was a king in his day, I would rather be myself, and your husband."

"A king?"

"Ay; Charles the Third of Spain. I do not suppose my little Giulietta ever heard of him."

"Never. Was he a great king?"

"No; but he was a fairly good one, which is quite as rare, and infinitely more respectable. It is even said that he never forgot past services; but that, of course, is incredible. The portrait, you see, is surmounted by the imperial crown of Spain, in small diamonds.",

"I never saw anything so beautiful! But I shall be afraid to wear it."

"Nay, child; wear it, break it, lose it. It is your own; and when it is gone, I will buy you another. That silver collar round your neck, though but a piece of peasant-jewellery, is of more intrinsic value. The ring is only a curious trifle."

"It is a royal ring, and you bought it for me!"

"No," he answers, carelessly. "I bought it with some other things, years ago, when I did not know of your existence; and then, not because I at all cared to possess it, but because it went with the lot. It was a mere chance that I had not thrown it away before now—wedded the sea with it, as the Doges of old time used to do, here in Venice. But I am glad, for your sake, carina, that the fishes did not get it."

By this time the amber ridge has apparently uplifted itself from the placid level of the Lagune. It assumes a broken outline. It resolves itself into a long stretch of hillocks and hollows of tawny sand, darkened here and there by patches of parched grass.

"Are you still minded for a glimpse of the Adriatic?" asks Donato, as their gondolier runs the boat aground in the shallows. "It is getting dusk, you know; and these sands are not pleasant to walk in."

But she minds neither the sands nor the dusk. So they land; but as they climb the desolate ridge, threading their way among pools and brambles, the lover is careful not to tell his young bride that this place was once the cemetery of the Jews of Venice; or that yonder shattered fragments of lichen-grown granite, which lie half-buried here and there in the drifted sands, are the desecrated graves of Shylock and his people.

And now they stand on the summit of the ridge, and the view lies open to them on both sides—on the one hand, the placid lagune; on the other, stealing up in long, lazy folds, and creaming listlessly against the shore, the dark blue Adriatic.

The girl clings silently to Donato's arm. It is the first time she has seen the sea.

They linger there, listening to the soft monotonous surge, watching the gathering gloom, till darkness warns them back to their gondola. And now once more they go upon their noiseless way; and the twilight takes them; and the hush of night falls upon the shining waters; and the crescent moon rises like a silver sickle in a field of stars.

This same evening, at this self-same hour, the mail-train, slowly steaming into the terminus at Munich, brings its first freight of Easter tourists; most of whom are English, bound for Vienna. For as yet there is no mountain railway over the Brenner; and at this season, travellers going to Italy take the Riviera route or the post-road over the Mont Cenis.

Though it is already summer in Venice, the evening here in Munich is cold and drizzly; and, save two ladies who have been walking up and down for the last ten minutes or so, and one or two railway officials in blue and silver uniform, the arrival platform is almost empty.

As the train creeps in, heavily laden, the taller of these ladies moves somewhat in advance of her companion, and stands alone near the edge of the platform. The next moment, a man's hand and arm are put out of one of the windows; a door is opened; and, contrary to all railway regulations, a gentleman jumps out while the train is yet moving.

"Lancelot!"

"You here, Winifred? This is what I did not expect!"

He grasps her hands with passionate eagerness. He all but takes her in his arms and kisses her.

"What an age it seems since we parted—years instead of months! And oh! how slow the train was! At every station, I longed to get out and thrash the engine-driver. My darling, how well you are looking! Is that Fräulein Brenda? But stay, I have a surprise for you—a great surprise! You were to know nothing till to-morrow; but since you are here, there is no help for it. I am not alone."

"Not alone?" Winifred repeats, looking nervously round. "What do you mean? . . . Ah!"

And with a cry of joyful recognition, she finds herself face to face with Mr. and Mrs. Pennefeather.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WEDDING BELLS.

"DID I not prophesy that my dearest Winifred would be Lady Brackenbury, after all? My child, I knew it as well as if I had peeped into the Book of the Future!"

"How could you know what I did not know myself?" said Winifred, laughing and colouring.

"Having eyes, my dear, and not being in the habit of going about with them shut, like the majority of my friends and neighbours, how could I help seeing a drama that was enacted under my very nose? And yet, when you overwhelmed me with that outburst of virtuous indignation . . . . . Ah, that was the very day when you pinned the five-pound note to Baby's cot, you darling!—as if I could ever forget it! And we thought some fairy godmother had come down the chimney! Do you remember how angry you were with poor me, and how I begged for forgiveness? . . . but there!—I am too happy to care to tease you. I declare, I was never half so happy in my life! How good it is to see you again! Missed you?—to say that I have missed you, is to convey no idea of the gap your absence has made in my little world; and as for the children . . . . Well, my dear, it has been enough to make any mother jealous! However, here you are—the same dear Wini-

fred; and here am I, happier and more prosperous than I ever expected to be in this world. Now shall I tell you when I missed you most, dear?—when our great good fortune befel us. After having pelted you for years with all my worries and grievances, it did seem hard not to be able to go to you with my joy and my gratitude—not to be able to say to you, 'See all that your noble Lancelot has done for us!' And now he crowns it by bringing us to Munich for your wedding! Why, my dear, we had no more notion of coming here than you had of seeing us! But Lord Brackenbury insisted that you would like Derwent to perform the ceremony, and that the change would do us all the good in the world; and—here we are! It couldn't have happened at a better moment, you see; for we had done, thank Heaven! with the Caldicotts; and the new church on the moor cannot be opened till the fall of the year; and baby is just weaned; and we have been able to pack off the children *en masse* to my sister Barbara at Chester; so we really had our time free for a holiday. And then, there was your trousseau! I confess I did long to be with you when you should open the boxes—five of them, my dear, and full of such beautiful things! Nothing ostentatious, you know—nothing extravagant; but all of the very best. There is a morning-robe of pearl-grey Indian cashmere lined with salmon-pink and trimmed with old Abruzzi lace, that brought tears of spite to Mrs. Caldicott's eyes when she saw it. And as for the under-linen, all marked with your initials in cypher, surmounted by an angelic little coronet. . . . Well, I can't trust myself to speak of it in vulgar prose. The Castelrosso herself, at all events, has none more ex-

quisite. The one thing that has grieved me is your wedding-dress. I had set my heart on white satin—that creamy white which Rubens and Vandyke painted, you know, with gold-coloured reflections in the folds. It was a blow to me, to be tied down to a plain white grosgrain. But you would have it so; and I could only submit, under protest. Then, to be candid, I must say I think the affair ought to come off at the British Embassy—people in your position, you know. . . . Ah! well, the circumstances, of course, are exceptional; but, for all that, I cannot help wishing the marriage wasn't going to be so dreadfully private!"

"Now tell me some of your own news," said Winifred, when Mrs. Pennefeather, punctuating her discourse at arbitrary intervals with hugs, and kisses, stopped at last from sheer want of breath.

"Happy is the nation, my dear, that has no history. I have no news of my own, except what you know already; and that is as good as it can well be. Our troubles are all over, and we have begun to live happy ever after. The Hermitage? No—we have not yet given up The Hermitage, because we don't know how soon our beautiful new Vicarage will be ready for occupation; but we have shut the house up, serenely conscious that there's nothing in it which the least ambitious burglar would care to steal. If only the children keep well, and Barbara will submit to be bored by them for a few weeks longer, I hope to get Derwent in the mind to go back by way of the Rhine and Brussels. It has been one of my dreams to see the Rhine—'the castled crag of Drachenfels,' you know, and 'the peasant-girls with deep-blue eyes,' and all the rest of it. Do for the scene of a novel? Ah! no,

my dear; once settled on Burfield Moor, I shall have something better to do than to write third-rate novels for second-rate publishers. Oh! I have never deceived myself as to the worth of my own productions! They are nothing but pot-boilers, my dear—pot-boilers of the thorny and brambly sort, crackling dismally under a pot which never had too much in it. Some day, perhaps, years to come, when the children are grown up, and I have discovered the true meaning and application of that obscure word, 'Leisure,' I may write one more story—just to show people that, after all, I am not quite such a fool as they take me for. But for literature, leisure and industry in equal parts is your only genuine prescription. What good book was ever written under pressure of haste and poverty? It's all very well to talk of necessity being the mother of invention; but *I* never found a sedimentary deposit of pure fiction at the bottom of a file of unpaid bills, or drew deep draughts of romantic inspiration from an empty larder! No, my dear Winifred, I have done with novel-writing as a drudgery; and, if ever I take it up again, it shall be as a luxury. But what were we talking about—news? Well, I have none of my own, and none of my neighbours'; that is to say, none worth repeating. You know, of course, that Viscount Frenchay is dead—the horrid old reprobate! Such a funeral as they gave him, too! Plumes and trappings, and all the panoply of humbug, with seventeen private carriages bringing up the rear! But such is fashionable woe. Instead of shedding tears for you, Society sheds carriages. Then there's Lady Symes, just returned from London, as old—and as young—as ever; looking as if she might have been born any time between the

Mammiferous Period and the day before yesterday. She called to congratulate us upon Derwent's preferment; and did it, of course, as spitefully as ever she knew how. 'You'll be buried alive, Mrs. Pennefeather,' she said; 'but then, you know, the man who wants to live at peace with his neighbours must inhabit a desert island. You'll at all events be out of the way of such tiresome people as myself.' To which I replied that even the advantages of premature interment would be dearly purchased at the price of her ladyship's visits. She enquired after you, and I told her you were still in Munich; and then she said that Mr. Fink and the Countess had last been heard of at Constantinople, and were not expected home before Midsummer. Now I think I have told you all the gossip of Langtrey and its neighbourhood."

This conversation—or, more correctly, this monologue—took place in an upper chamber of the Hotel Maulick, where Lancelot had retained rooms for his guests. And his guests Mr. and Mrs. Pennefeather were to be as long as they remained in Munich.

They stayed just one fortnight; at the end of which time Lancelot Brackenbury and Winifred Savage were married one morning in the Bavarian Protestant Chapel; then an ugly little red-brick building in a by-street opening from the Schrannen-Platz, in the Old Quarter of the city. Mr. Pennefeather read the service; Pastor Kreutzmann gave the bride away; and Kätchen and Brenda did duty as bridesmaids. Guests, musicians, cards, rejoicings, there were none. Not even the marriage of Cesare Donato and Giulietta Beni was more absolutely private.

In the meanwhile, carefully as their secret had

been guarded by the high contracting parties, it leaked out somehow or another, up in the "North Countree;" and, despite all Lancelot's precautions, the bells of Singleton rang at joyous intervals throughout his wedding-day.

CHAPTER XXV.

AT THE OLD VILLA.

"It is useless. The place is gone to ruin, and deserted."

"Ring once more, at all events!" said the lady in the carriage to the gentleman at the gate.

"I have done nothing but ring once more for the last quarter of an hour. However, to oblige you, I will begin again."

And again he pulled furiously at the iron chain; and again they heard the prolonged pealing of a distant bell.

It was a narrow road, closed in by high white walls and overshadowed by the meeting boughs of acacias, laburnums, and mulberry-trees growing in private grounds on either side. The carriage—a hired one, drawn by a pair of active little Neapolitan hacks—waited at the entrance to what looked like a large villa standing in a considerable space of neglected shrubbery. The rusty gates showed traces of faded gilding. The semi-circular area in front of these gates, and the carriage-drive within, were grass-grown and weedy. The house, or as much of it as was visible between the trees, looked rambling, dingy, and dilapidated.

"One might ring till Doomsday!" said the gentleman, after another impatient attack upon the bell.

"But if there is really a custode" . . . .

"If there is really a custode, that custode must be out, asleep, or dead; and in either case, I submit that it is sheer waste of time to wait for him any longer. We must drive over another day, and hope for better fortune."

Then, turning to the driver, he said, with his hand on the carriage-door—"Back to Sorrento."

But as he put his foot on the step, a little bare-footed, brown-skinned girl with black locks flying, came racing to the gate. She carried a big key which she was only just tall enough to put into the lock, and which, with both little hands, she had scarcely strength to turn.

"Are you the custode?" asked the Englishman, smiling.

Showing a double row of glittering teeth, the small girl shook her head and explained how her father kept the keys, and how, after running all over the house to look for him, she had at last found him in the grounds, attending upon another party of visitors.

"Nobody has been to look over the villa for more than a year," she said, chattering away with the easy volubility of a woman of forty. "But Ecco!—it is always like that, you know—'the net comes in empty, or it breaks through with the fish.' The villa is to be let furnished or unfurnished. It contains twenty-six rooms, besides kitchens, offices, and stables; and the situation is the best in Castellamare. Vossignorie will be pleased to come round to the kitchen entrance; the big doors are locked."

They followed her down a path leading to the back of the house, and across a paved yard in the middle of which there was a draw-well surmounted by a picturesque wrought-iron canopy. It was a neglected, forlorn-looking place; grass growing between the stones underfoot; window panes cracked; shutters hanging from broken hinges; paint blistered; cocks and hens scratching about on heaps of vegetable refuse which looked as if they might have been accumulating for years. Entering the house by a side-door and leaving to the left a room whence issued a confused steam of washing, cooking, and garlic, the strangers followed their guide along a stone passage, through a vaulted corridor, and into a spacious hall paved with black and white marble. Here a fine double staircase supported on massive scagliola columns led to a gallery from which the upper rooms opened; while through a central sky-light, a flood of sunshine streamed down upon the pavement.

"This is the hall you told me about, Lancelot—the hall in which your people used to dance the Saltarella by torchlight!" whispers the lady, clinging more closely to her husband's arm. "You described it to me on Christmas Eve—do you remember?"

Silently, sadly, he looks round. His thoughts have gone back to the far past, and he is slow to answer.

"Yes; I remember."

The stairs, the balustrades, the walls, are coated with dust. The marble floor is grimed like a street pavement; and in every corner and nook, and behind every pillar, lie drifted heaps of dead leaves, straws, scraps of torn paper, and the like.

"Vossignorie will be pleased to take the trouble to

follow me," says the small girl, darting forward to fling open a lofty door, and rattling off her lesson with eager self-importance. "The reception-rooms are all on the ground-floor. The ceilings are from mythological designs by Pietro di Cortona; the rooms are named after the subjects of the frescoes. We are now in the Saloon of Diana. Here one sees the goddess attired by her nymphs—yonder she pursues the wild boar; in the third compartment, she returns with the trophies of the chase. The dogs are painted by a German artist, and are considered very fine. The next room is the Saloon of Mars" . . . . .

But this was too much for Lancelot Brackenbury's patience.

"Enough, my little maiden," he said, abruptly. "I know it all. I have been here before."

The small guide was silenced, but incredulous. She was eight years old, and had lived in the empty villa as long as she could remember. All who came to view the place she had seen; but these two she had never seen. She fell back, however, and followed instead of leading.

They went on from room to room; from the Saloon of Diana to the Saloon of Venus, from the Saloon of Venus to the Saloon of Apollo—huge, echoing, melancholy apartments big enough for concert rooms, with floors of mixed tesseræ in coloured marbles, like petrified pâté de foie gras. Here mirrors black with dust alternated upon the walls with panels of faded arabesques, while all the gods of Olympus sprawled overhead on dingy clouds, or disported themselves in landscapes of blue and green. Most of these rooms were quite bare; but in one or two there were pyramidal

heaps of furniture draped with dusty sheets which took fantastic forms, and looked as if they might cover funeral pyres and heaps of slain.

"Did you ever see anything so mournful?" said Lancelot. "It is like a house desolated by plague! And yet, somehow, I would rather see it like this—empty and dilapidated—than modernised out of recognition, and full of alien faces. I could almost fancy now that no one has lived here since we left the place sixteen years ago."

Then, turning to the child who was following close at their heels, he asked how long the house had been untenanted.

This, however, she did not, or would not, know. It had been empty for some time—two years, perhaps; possibly three. Her father would be here presently, and could answer the Signore's questions. Would the Signore in the meanwhile be pleased to take the trouble to visit the rooms upstairs?

He shook his head.

"There is nothing to see overhead but suite after suite of bed-rooms," he said, addressing himself to Winifred. "But if you don't mind climbing a good many stairs, I should like to show you the view from the loggia in the tower. No—this way. It is nearer to cross the terrace than to go back through the hall."

So saying, he led the way to a side-room opening from the Saloon of Apollo, and decorated with panels of fêtes champêtres in the Watteau style.

"This," he said, undoing the fastenings of a window that opened on a paved terrace beyond, "was my mother's boudoir. It faces, you see, to the south.

She lived upon sunshine. Sometimes, when she was well enough, poor darling, her couch was carried outside, and placed under the orange-trees—there used to be a row of them in tubs, all along the terrace. Sixteen years ago! . . . . It seems like yesterday."

The terrace—decorated at intervals with sculptured vases full of trailing ivy—overlooked a desolate garden laid out in formal beds, where flowers and weeds ran wild. Beyond the garden, all was lawn and shrubbery, with distant glimpses of the harbour of Castellamare.

Still going first, Lancelot went on to a door at the further end of the terrace. It stood ajar, and admitted them to a basement chamber, used apparently as a storehouse for garden lumber. Hence, by a staircase with many landings, they made their way to a loggia under the roof. This loggia, open on all sides and surrounded by a parapet, commanded a view which is certainly one of the most beautiful, and is perhaps the most famous, in the world. The crescent bay, purple and emerald under the rocky headlands, bluer than the bluest summer sky out in the open, lay outstretched before them, from Miseno to Sorrento. Ischia and Procida, bathed in sun-mist, slept like cloud-islands on the Western horizon. Naples, and the scattered villages between Portici and Torre dell' Annunziata, gleamed like a string of scattered pearls along "the beachèd margent of the sea;" while Vesuvius, rising out of verdure into barrenness, gathering villages, vineyards, and corn-slopes in the folds of her mighty mantle, lifted her fire-smitten cone and plume of faint brown smoke against the stainless sky. So still, so distant

was the scene, that not even the tiny steamer crossing from Naples to Sorrento seemed in motion. The fishing barks with transverse sails gleaming here and there against the blue, looked like sea-birds asleep on the waters. Not even the floating island of tunny-nets guarded, nearer shore, by a flotilla of flat-bottomed boats, betrayed the faintest sign of groundswell from beneath. All was as fixed, as placid, as unreal, as a painted panorama.

Lancelot and Winifred leaned, side by side, upon the parapet. Long and silently they gazed on sea and shore, island and mountain and sky. For weeks they had been wandering together, wedded lovers, happy with the first happiness of perfect union. Together they had plucked the myrtle blooms in the pillared shade of Ægina; together listened to the murmuring of the bees on the thyme-tufted slopes of Hymettus, and to the nightingales singing at midday in the pomegranate thickets on the banks of Ilissus. By moonlight they had trodden the drifted petals of the frail dog-rose in the marble porticoes of the Acropolis at Athens, lingered at sunset in the temple solitudes of Girgenti, and gathered purple asphodel in the plains of Pæstum. Colour and form and light, splendour of morn and even, pathos of ruin, and the tender grace of a vanished past, had been with them at every stage in their pilgrimage; but neither in Greece, nor in Sicily, nor on the lone shores of Posidonia, had they looked upon a scene more fair than this. It was no new scene, either; for they were staying now at Sorrento, and saw it from their windows every day.

"Is it ever anything but summer here?" asked Winifred, dreamily.

"I am sorry to say, it is occasionally winter. I have seen leaden skies, and persistent rains, and even fogs and frosts, in this fairyland of roses and sunshine. I have seen Vesuvius white with snow, like a smoky bride-cake."

"And you have seen Vesuvius in eruption, too!" she said, quickly.

"Well, that is a rather forcible way of expressing it," he answered smiling. "I have seen showers of red-hot stones and cinders, followed now and then by a streak of lava; but that is only what every Neapolitan sees twice or thrice a year. We don't call those little freaks and spurts by so fine a name as eruptions."

"I wish the mountain would be pleased to indulge in a freak before we go away," said Winifred.

Lancelot pulled out his field-glass, and scanned the summit long and critically.

"I think it not impossible that your wish may be gratified," he said, handing her the glass. "Do you see those patches of pale yellow about the mouth of the crater? That is fresh sulphur; and we used to observe that a deposit of fresh sulphur pretty surely indicated a coming display of fireworks. In the meanwhile, however, if we are to make the ascent of the mountain, we had better do it within the next day or two."

"Oh, but I should like best to go up when there is something to be seen!" she said, eagerly.

"You would not like to be stifled by sulphur-fumes and peppered with red-hot stones?" said Lancelot. "At all events, I should not like it for you. Besides, you have no idea" . . . .

He broke off abruptly.

"Look there!" he said, in an altered voice.

Following the direction of his eyes, Winifred saw three persons—a lady and gentleman, accompanied by a gardener in a blouse—crossing a space of open lawn between the trees, about a quarter of a mile away.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE OTHER PARTY.

LANCELOT stood looking fixedly at the three figures in the garden below.

"It is the custode, showing the other party over the grounds," said Winifred.

"Give me the glass."

He put out his hand for it without turning his head; adjusted, and turned it upon "the other party."

"They came down the orange-walk," he said, more to himself, as it seemed, than to his wife. "They are going up to the knoll—for the view."

"It cannot be so fine as from here," said Winifred.

Then, observing the intentness with which he continued to watch these strangers, she looked at them again.

There was nothing remarkable in their appearance. The gentleman wore a dark blue suit, and a navy cap with a gold band. The lady looked slight and girlish. They were more than a quarter of a mile away, as the crow flies; and their faces were turned towards the sea.

Slowly they crossed the open. Slowly they climbed the little knoll, and there stood, looking over the bay. Winifred saw the man take a small telescope from his pocket, carefully regulate it, and hand it to his companion. He seemed to be directing her attention towards Vesuvius.

"I wonder if they are looking at those sulphur-patches," she said.

Lancelot shut the glass up with a click, and thrust it into the sling-case at his side.

"Let us go down," he said, quickly. "We have been here long enough; and—and I want to show you the grounds. Do you mind?"

Winifred did not mind. She would fain have lingered awhile longer; but, seeing that he was impatient to be gone, she said nothing. So they went down the stairs and along the terrace, and instead of retracing their steps through the house, made straight for the neglected flower-garden below.

"There is nothing to see here," said Lancelot. "That cippus?—a poor thing! we can look at it as we return. I am taking you to the orange-walk, dearest one—this way!"

He had often spoken to her of the orange-walk; and she knew that it was the scene of some of his earliest and dearest memories. And now — a close berceau of fragrant shade studded with clusters of green and golden oranges — it opened before her eyes.

"Oh, this is beautiful!" she said. "It is like the garden of Aladdin. Let us go slowly. Stay! there is a seat yonder. Shall we not rest a little while in this enchanted place?"

But still he hastened.

"As we return, dearest," he said again; "as we return!"

They emerged from the green tunnel into the blue day. They crossed the open sward, and turned in the direction of the little knoll; now open and solitary in the sun.

Almost running, Lancelot made for the slope, and there stood, looking round. Presently, the man in the blouse emerged from a laurel-thicket some few hundred yards away. Hobbling towards them, he apologised, cap in hand, for not waiting upon them sooner. He had been attending, he said, upon another party.

"What has become of your other party?"

"They came by water, Signore—having left their boat at the landing-place below. I have let them out by a side-door which opens upon a path cut in the cliff."

"Yes, yes, I know—the path that leads down to the sea. Is the door locked? Quick!—give me the key."

The man stared—a pallid, sickly fellow with a club foot, which dragged painfully behind him as he limped along.

"Scusate, Signore," he said, civilly. "I am forbidden to let my keys out of my own hands; but I will let you through with pleasure."

Limping, he led the way along a walk masked on one side by a laurel fence, and bounded on the other by a lofty wall. This path ended in a door opening upon a grassy platform, below which a path, cut here and there into steps, wound down the face of the cliff.

"Wait here for me, Winifred," said Lancelot, as the custode turned the key. "I have a fancy to see in which direction those people are gone.——No, no! don't follow me. The steps are shallow and slippery. Stay where you are."

Shallow and slippery though they were, his own foot was swift and true. Springing from ledge to ledge as fearlessly and familiarly as if no sixteen years had fled since last he trod that perilous way, he made straight for a jutting shelf of rock some sixty or seventy feet below. From this point, all the windings of the downward path, and the coast-line for half a mile or so, were open to view. The post-road from Castellamare to Sorrento ran between the base of the cliffs and the sea. To the left, it vanished round a bold headland, on the shoulder of which a gang of quarrymen were at work. To the right, it descended at a gradual incline, and was lost to sight behind the little promontory, or Molo, which here encloses the harbour of Castellamare.

Shading his eyes with his hand, the young man looked up and down the road, and up and down the path, and saw only the quarrymen on the cliff-side, and a peasant driving a mule along the dusty thoroughfare below.

What had become of that "other party"?

They left their boat at the landing-place; so said the custode. Where, then, was the boat? Surely the landing-place ought to be visible from here! Or was it hidden by that group of water-washed rocks over which the surf was foaming? This he could not remember.

Doubting whether to go on or to wait, he stood

hesitating. If he went on, he would lose sight of the rocks and of that spot where the landing-place must lie hidden. If he remained up here, he should at least make sure of seeing the boat put off from shore.

All at once, he saw a man out upon the rocks; a sailor, with open shirt-collar and knotted kerchief flying in the breeze. Heedless of spray and surf, the fellow leaped from crag to crag, putting his hand to the side of his mouth, as if shouting, and waving his broad-brimmed straw hat above his head. Then, presently, he clambered down, hand under hand, and dropped apparently into an unseen boat below. Yet a moment or two, and the boat itself emerged into sight some hundred yards or so farther on; a ship's boat manned by six blue-jackets and a steersman. In the stern seat, still with their backs towards the shore and their faces towards Naples, sat the two strangers—the lady in her brown hat and drooping feather; the gentleman with his gold-laced cap.

Lancelot watched them through his glass. He looked, as it were, right down into the boat, and upon the upturned faces of the rowers. They were pulling straight from shore; as straight as if bound for the opposite side of the bay. Once clear of the surf, their oars rose and fell with the precision of clockwork. Every moment, the strip of blue widened between them and the rocks; every moment, the boat seemed to diminish, and their faces to become less distinct.

Now they alter their course, bearing away in the direction of Portici; and now he moves—he in the gold-laced cap .... Will he look back? No; he stoops to fold a rug about his lady's feet! He bends towards

her, as if in earnest conversation . . . . he rests his arm on the back of the seat . . . .

"Lancelot!"

So far away already! The features of the rowers are no longer distinguishable . . . .

"Lancelot!—give me your hand. I am afraid to go back . . . and I am afraid to go forward!"

He flung the glass upon the sward, and ran to help her.

"Disobedient wife! Did I not tell you to stay where you were?"

"What woman ever yet did as she was bidden?"

"Take care. The steps are broken away. . . So! —now you are safe. But what possessed you to venture down alone?"

"What possessed me? The spirit of mutiny—of curiosity—of jealousy."

"Jealousy?"

"Why not? Do you suppose that I have none in my composition? Ah! how little you know me! I could be as green-eyed as Othello, if you gave me cause. But what has become of your innamorata?"

"What *do* you mean?"

"Is she gone? Have Calypso and Odysseus changed places, and has the enchantress sailed away, leaving the hero disconsolate? Is that her golden galley?"

Laughing, she snatched up the field-glass, and followed the course of the boat.

"Come," she said; "you may as well make a clean breast of it. Where did you meet her? What is her name? Above all, is she pretty?"

They had again changed their course, and were making, apparently, for some point between Castellamare

and Torre dell' Annunziata. Already the boat was so far distant that Lancelot could barely distinguish the rowers from the rowed. And yet . . . if Winifred had not taken possession of the glass. . . .

"You will not tell me whether she is pretty? Decidedly, you mean to make me jealous!"

"My dearest girl, if it were not altogether too ridiculous. . . ."

"Well, if it were not altogether too ridiculous—what then?"

"Then I would tell you that I have never, to my knowledge, seen that lady's face; that I don't know whether she is young or old, plain or pretty!"

"You expect me to believe that?"

"I expect you to believe whatever I say—seriously."

And again his eyes wandered to the boat; now so small that it looked like some kind of six-legged insect paddling along the face of the waters.

"It was not the lady who attracted my attention; but her companion. He reminded me of—of a fellow I used to know—years ago—in my old student-days. . . . ."

"In Paris?"

"But it was only a chance resemblance. Shall we go up again?"

He helped her back, step by step, till they reached the upper level. Here the lame custode awaited them.

"Who were those people?" Lancelot asked, carelessly. "Where do they come from?"

The man shook his head. They were strangers; he knew nothing of them.

"Are there any private yachts or ships of war stationed at Castellamare?"

No; there was nothing of the kind. Some six or eight merchant craft, he believed, were lying just now in the harbour; but as for ships of war, they had not seen so much as a gun-boat in these waters for the last ten years.

Then they went back slowly; resting awhile in the orange-walk, and turning aside to look at a little casino, the walls of which were encrusted with fragments of inscriptions and basreliefs discovered among the foundations of a Roman villa which once occupied the site of the present residence.

"And now, dear, you have seen it all—the house in which I was born; the gardens, the orange-walk, the old cliff-path by which we went up and down so often—Cuthbert and I. He kept his boat at Castellamare; but it used to be brought round every morning to the landing-place yonder. There was one cranny in the cliff, I remember—lower down than where we stood just now—in which an acanthus had taken root. It flowered every summer. I wonder if it grows there still! . . . Ah, well! I am not sorry to have seen the old place once more; but never again—never again!"

With a sigh, he gathered a sprig of myrtle and put it in his purse; and presently they were rattling along the coast-road, in a cloud of dust, on their way back to Sorrento.

But Lancelot was silent and thoughtful all the rest of that day.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"NO BIGGER THAN A MAN'S HAND."

LODGING in Sorrento at the Hotel della Sirena, Lancelot and Winifred found the place full of English, and themselves surrounded by a halo of popularity. Nor—having regard to the romantic nature of the British tourist—was that result surprising. Youth, wealth, rank, good looks were theirs; and besides this fourfold passport to success, our bride and bridegroom reaped the fruits of that peculiar interest which attaches, however irrationally, to the earlier stages of matrimony.

"Lord and Lady Brackenbury—on their wedding tour—only two months married, I hear—brother to that Lord Brackenbury who disappeared so mysteriously, you know, about five years ago—immensely rich—coal mines somewhere in the north—Pretty?—oh, awfully pretty—quite beautiful, in fact—No money, they say—ancient family—quite a *mariage de cœur*—charming couple! He paints, you know—was to have been an artist—makes lovely sketches—the father was British Ambassador here at Naples, for ever so many years—most extraordinary affair that, about the elder brother—oh, murdered!—undoubtedly murdered—excessively eccentric—used to travel armed to the teeth, with a hundred thousand pounds' worth of jewels in an iron box—a premium to brigands, as one may say. Indeed, yes—what else was to be expected?—No, I don't think the body was ever found—quite a *cause célèbre*—Did you notice Lady Brackenbury's dress this morning?

Wasn't it perfectly exquisite, and *so* simple!—ah, well! *my* husband is over head and ears in love with her—and yours?—How amusing!—But really, you know, they are very nice—couldn't be nicer—I have written to my people in Cheshire to be sure to call upon them, as soon as they return home—Lancashire, did you say? —Ah well, their place is just on the borders of both counties,—partly in Cheshire, partly in Lancashire—you may call it which you please! By the way, wasn't Vesuvius lovely last night? Did you see that streak of fire on the Naples side of the cone? The landlord said it was sulphur; but that's nonsense—it must have been lava—Giuseppe, our courier, came to us before we had left the table d'hôte, to say how fine the mountain was, and to ask if we would like a boat—we were on the water for nearly three hours—oh, delightful!—smooth as glass—we did not get back to our rooms till nearly midnight —yes, indeed!—most fortunate—many people are here for months together, and see nothing but a little smoke all the time!"

Such, with variations, was the kind of gossip going on daily among the visitors at the Sirena. Conscious, meanwhile, of a prevailing atmosphere of smiles and pleasantness, Lancelot and Winifred took life on its sunny side and made perpetual holiday. They rode on donkeys, they boated, they walked, they drove; they ran over for a couple of days to Capri, and saw the blue grotto; they made the excursion to Amalfi and Salerno; they sketched everywhere—among the pines of Massa, and the lone rocks of Galli, and the pathetic solitudes of Pompeii. They, too, saw that "streak of fire" on Vesuvius—a thin red line edged by a wavering fringe of lurid smoke. Lancelot at once pronounced

it to be a slender stream of lava. Next morning, however, there was nothing to be seen save a long brown splash, and a fresh deposit of sulphur round the lip of the cone.

All this time, they were daily planning the ascent of the mountain, and daily deferring it in favour of other excursions; Winifred being, in truth, more anxious to go than was Lancelot to take her.

"If my husband made a full confession of his sins," said Winifred, "he would own to having purposely and maliciously interposed every obstacle he can think of!"

"I should be glad if you gave up the idea," he replied. "It is an unfit excursion for a lady."

"Ladies go up every day!"

"Ladies do many things which they ought not to be allowed to do; Vesuvius being one of those things, and the Great Pyramid another."

"Nevertheless, I have set my heart on ascending Vesuvius—and the Great Pyramid also, if ever you take me to Egypt. But you promise that it shall really be to-morrow?"

"If you must have it so; and if nothing happens to prevent."

"What should happen?—An eruption? Perhaps you have bespoken one for the purpose!"

"Just that! Shall we say:—Positively for one night only; Amphitheatre Royal, the Bay of Naples. By special desire—to-morrow, Wednesday, the sixteenth instant, that renowned performer, MOUNT VESUVIUS will have the honour to ERUPT at midnight precisely. The audience are requested to be in their seats by forty-five minutes past eleven. Carriages to be ordered at

break of day. Prices . . . . well, what about prices? Shall we be justified in saying a guinea a stall?"

Winifred first laughed, and then looked grave.

"I think it is rather shocking to make light of anything so serious," she said.

"You are right, and I ought to know better. An eruption took place one autumn, while I was at school at Lausanne. I saw the scene of disaster afterwards, and a terrible scene it was. A whole village—the village of Caposecco—was overwhelmed. One poor old man had both feet shrivelled; several brave fellows who were rendering assistance to the sufferers were blinded by the burning ashes; and some very old people were burned alive in their beds. There was great misery all that winter among the unfortunate refugees, most of whom fled into Castellamare. Ah, dear child! it is but too true—an eruption of Vesuvius is no laughing matter."

This conversation took place one Tuesday morning in a secluded creek known at Sorrento as "Queen Johanna's Bath." Entered from the sea by a narrow breach in the cliffs, this creek expands within into a deep, pellucid pool completely shut in on every side—

"deep as an urn
By rocks encompass'd."

An arch of ruined brickwork spans the cleft which was once the water-gate of a Roman villa. The surrounding cliffs are thick-set with brick foundations, and fragments of reticulated vaulting. On every ledge and in every cranny, grow mosses and wild flowers; and on the grassy level above, hidden away among

violet-roots and brambles, may yet be found, by those who care to seek for them, patches of mosaic pavement, and coins, and graven gems.

To this solitary spot they had often come of late; Lancelot with his sketching materials, Winifred with her book. It was a nook for a painter, or a poet, or a pair of lovers. Through the dark arch, they caught a glimpse of the bay and the gliding sails beyond. In the translucent depths beneath their feet, every shell and seaweed and starfish was as visible as if seen through a microscope; while the air was filled with sweet scents of clover and wild thyme, "and murmuring of innumerable bees."

All that day, the sea was calm and the sky cloudless. Not a leaf stirred upon the trees; not a ripple broke the glassy surface of the bay. Even Vesuvius, seeming to share in the universal languor, sent up so imperceptible a thread of smoke that, but for the little canopy of cloud which hung motionless above the cone, it might have been doubted that the mountain breathed.

The night that followed was very still and hot, and up till twelve o'clock the gardens of the Sirena were full of loiterers watching the fireflies, sipping coffee and ice drinks, and smoking cigarettes. Even when the last of these were gone and the hotel was closed for the night, the little world of Sorrento was still abroad, twanging mandolines at street-corners; laughing and chattering and story-telling down by the water-steps in the harbour; and singing barcaroles from boat to boat out in the bay.

Lancelot woke early next morning. He looked at his watch. It was four o'clock, and through the closed

jalousies he could see that the sun was shining. Very softly, he rose, stole into his dressing-room, and opened the window. The sea was as smooth, the sky as cloudless, as yesterday. There was not a sail in sight; there was not a human being stirring. There was a dreamy scent of orange-blossoms on the air; the thrushes were singing in the gardens below; and a lovely cloud, rosy and golden, "a cloud no bigger than a man's hand," hung over Vesuvius, like the cloud that rested on the Ark.

The young man looked long at this fair, familiar scene; turned away with a sigh; then partly dressed himself, and sat down to write.

For several mornings he had waked about this time—in fact, ever since that visit to the old villa, now nearly a week ago—and each morning he had found it impossible to sleep again. So, having an accumulation of letters to answer, he made a virtue of necessity, and went to work. But to work was not easy. His thoughts wandered; his pen stopped; and he caught himself more than once staring into vacancy, and there seeing, not the wardrobe in front of his writing-table, but the home of his boyhood, the lawns and shrubberies in which he used to play, and a certain grassy knoll on which three figures stood, with their faces towards the sea. One of those figures haunted him. He was impatient with himself for his folly; he told himself again and again that it was a mere chance resemblance—that it was no resemblance at all—and yet . . . and yet he could not shake off the impression! So strong was that impression, and so startling, that he rode over next day to Castellamare for no other purpose than to make enquiry about the

shipping there lying at anchor. Those enquiries, however, resulted in nothing. The harbour was crowded with masts, and the quays with rough seafaring men; but the vessels were all Italian traders from various parts of the coast—some from Reggio, some from Leghorn, two from Tarento, three or four from Marsala, one from Bari, and at least half a dozen from Genoa. Besides these, there was a small Government steamer belonging to the dockyard, and a score or more of those picturesque luggers laden with pottery, maccaroni, wine, oil, and grain, which ply between Naples and the smaller coast towns. As for local fishing and pleasure craft, their name was legion. But English yachts, or English vessels of any kind, there were none.

And now, an end to dreams and fancies! Here were letters from his lawyer, his architect, his builder, his agent, and a dozen more, all waiting to be answered out of hand. He must get those answers written before breakfast; for at eleven, they were to start for Naples; and at Naples they had arranged to put up for a couple of days, in order to ascend Vesuvius from Resina next morning.

So again he dipped his pen in the ink, and went on writing.

Presently the clock on the mantelpiece struck five. Then, fancying that he heard a sound in the next room, he rose, and peeped through the half-open door.

Winifred still slept. Her hair fell in heavy masses on the pillow; her cheek rested on her outstretched arm; her hand, half drooping, half unclosed, lay just where it was lying when he left her. Listening to her gentle breathing, looking upon her beauty with a

painter's eye and a lover's tenderness, Lancelot lingered for a moment; then turned away to resume his work.

But, glancing towards the open window as he passed, he beheld a startling change in the placid scene without. Instead of that little roseate cloud which reminded him just now of the cloud upon the Ark, he saw a huge column of smoke rising in white and golden-tinted masses against an intensely clear blue sky. Even as he gazed upon it, the speed and density of this column increased with amazing rapidity, as if propelled each moment at a higher and higher pressure.

He ran to wake Winifred.

"Get up, dear!" he said. "Get up at once! Vesuvius is smoking magnificently; but it may not last many minutes."

She got up, flushed and startled, letting him wrap her in a warm dressing-gown, and following him to the window.

Even in that brief moment, the smoke had doubled in volume; and still, with inconceivable force and swiftness, it kept rushing upward—developing, spreading, changing; towering higher and higher; piling itself mass above mass; assuming a thousand strange and fantastic shapes; shapes of sunlit promontories, of castles, lions, capes, aqueducts, Alps! It was no longer a column, but a gigantic plume; it was no longer a plume, but an arch—an arch indescribably splendid and stupendous, spanning half the horizon.

Winifred clasped her hands and stood breathless.

"Oh, Lancelot!" she said, awe-struck, "it is an eruption!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FOR FEAR OF THE LAVA.

For a long time—perhaps an hour, but it seemed like half a day—Lancelot and Winifred watched this splendid pageant, of which they were, apparently, the only spectators. Not a living creature seemed to be awake in all Sorrento. At length a sleepy porter appeared in the gardens below; then a couple of vetturini; and by-and-by the place became filled with little groups of idlers, staring at the mountain and the smoke.

By eight, everyone in the hotel was up and out; the English all talking of "the eruption;" the Italians all denying that it was anything but a temporary disturbance.

"An eruption? Oh, dear, no—nothing of the kind!" said the smiling landlord. "Eruptions do not begin in this way. A fine sight—nothing more! These ladies and gentlemen may rest assured that it will all be over in an hour or two."

Then, turning to Lancelot and Winifred, who were breakfasting at a little table in the garden, he added:—

"Milord and miladi will not be disappointed of their excursion. They will ascend the mountain to-morrow all the same. Ah, we who know Vesuvius are not easily deceived by appearances!"

Lancelot was of the landlord's opinion. The boatmen, the vetturini, all told the same tale. Vesuvius was smoking a big pipe this morning, instead of a little cigarette—Ecco tutto!

By nine—the weathercock pointing due west—the huge smoke-arch reached right across the eastward arm of the bay, roofing in all the coast between Vesuvius and Castellamare.

The Brackenburys, meanwhile, put off the carriage till the afternoon, and spent the morning in their own balcony, where Lancelot set himself to sketch the convolutions of the smoke.

All at once, he laid down his brush and listened.

"Do you hear that?" he said.

It was a something so low, so deep, so remote, that it seemed to be felt rather than heard. It was more a trembling of the air—or the earth—than a sound.*

"What is it?"

"Hush! it comes again!"

It came again; louder, but not less remote. It sounded like the throbbing of a deep and mighty organ pipe. Then once more it died away.

At the same moment, an immense volley of vapour shot up into the midst of the lovely cloud, mingling with those masses of white and gold, and turning them copper and purple. Then the subterraneous thunder rolled louder and longer; and the smoke poured out all black, rent with flashes of fire; and three small streams of lava, white and seething, began slowly crawling down the cone.

* Notwithstanding that the main action of "Lord Brackenbury" may be supposed to take place during the sixth decade of the present century, the eruption here described is the Great Eruption of 1872. This anachronism will, it is trusted, be condoned in favour of the truth of local colour with which the author, as an eyewitness of the event, is enabled to present the scene.

That this was the beginning of an eruption was now beyond doubt. All nature seemed to know it. The birds ceased singing, and fled to the bushes. The cattle came straying home alone from the pasture. The landlord's big hound slunk into his kennel, and howled dismally. The air meanwhile became hot and heavy: while far away at the other side of the mountain, apparently in the deep hollow between Monte Somma and the cone, a cloud of steam and smoke marked the path of some vast lava-stream not visible from Sorrento.

"It is impossible!" said Lancelot. "Nothing remains the same for ten seconds together. Form, colour, light, shadow, change and interchange and shift incessantly!—I give it up."

The balcony was strewn with sketches begun and flung down unfinished. He gathered these scattered leaves into a portfolio, and put away his colours.

"What shall we do?" he said, pacing backwards and forwards. "Will you be afraid to go to Naples? Or are you minded to stay here, and watch the eruption from a distance? Don't you feel a desperate longing to do something?—to go somewhere?"

Winifred at once said that she would rather go to Naples.

It was already evident, indeed, that the main flow of the lava was on the Naples side. Even while they were yet debating when to start, a column of tawny smoke began rising from some point behind the Observatory. This column was presently followed by another and another; all separate, as if indicating the sites of great fires. The cloud-arch, meanwhile, had spread almost to the environs of Sorrento.

It was late in the afternoon—nearly five o'clock—when Lancelot and Winifred drove into Castellamare. They found the harbour half emptied of its shipping (most of the vessels having crossed to Naples) and the station crowded with country-folk, raving, wailing, gesticulating.

"There was no danger where this lot came from," said a fat official, shrugging his shoulders contemptuously ("questa roba" were his words; literally "this stuff," or "this rubbish"); "but the Municipality of Naples has put on a service of gratuitous trains, and we are obliged to take them."

A barefooted woman sitting on a bundle of bedding caught the words, and sprang in sudden frenzy to her feet.

"Hear him!" she cried, tossing her arms wildly. "Hear him!—he says there is no danger! Holy Mother of God!—no danger, with red cinders showering down into the streets of Portici; and everyone flying for fear of the lava; and San Sebastiano and Massa di Somma in flames!"

One or two intending passengers paused at this, and began questioning the guard.

"Is it safe to go to Naples?"

"Does the lava flow towards the coast?"

"If Portici is threatened, then surely the line is also threatened?"

But the guard, and some three or four travellers who had just come in with the train, declared unanimously that the cinders were not falling in Portici, and that there was no present danger.

"They are mad with fright, and say whatever comes uppermost," growled the fat official, transfixing

a huge cigar with his pen-knife before proceeding to light it. "These ladies and gentlemen, if they are going to Naples, had better take their places."

So, despite a warning howl from the crowd, the passengers took their seats.

There were two gentlemen in the compartment with Lancelot and Winifred; one a military man in a blue cloak, the other a civilian.

"If it does come down, it will hardly select the moment when we are passing!" said the warrior, unbuckling his sword and settling himself in his corner.

His companion laughed lightly.

"Carambo! It was reported an hour ago that the Lagrima-Christi vines were in peril; and they are on this side."

Lancelot glanced at Winifred, and felt a pang of apprehension; but she was anxiously watching the poor folk on the platform, among whom she had distributed all the lire in her purse, and she heard nothing of this conversation. Already, too, the train was in motion. They could not go back if they would. It was too late.

Speeding forward now into the deepening gloom, they hear the terrible voice of the mountain rolling louder and nearer. On every by-road skirted or bridged by the line of railway, are seen straggling processions of footsore fugitives, and files of country carts laden with poor furniture. At every little station there is the same frightened crowd — old men; old women; mothers with infants in their arms; little children, some with their aprons full of bread, others carrying a pet kitten, or a bird in a cage. Many of these poor souls have stored their household goods in

the cellars of their cottages, rescuing only their beds and bedding. Not the least striking feature of this universal Exodus is the indolence and indifference of the strong. While the weak and the aged are dragging trucks and barrows and plodding under burdens, all the railway bridges and embankments, all the little sea-side piers and landing-places, all the walls and house-tops, are crowded with men and boys staring, clamouring, smoking, and doing nothing.

Leaving in the rear the long mound of Pompeii and passing Torre dell' Annunziata, the line now skirts the lower slopes of Vesuvius. The great cone towers grey and threatening against a black background, and, from the heart of a vast column of smoke, throws up a perpetually rising and falling fountain of living fire. Drawing still nearer, that fountain is seen to be mingled with showers of red hot stones. Now, too, the din of the eruption becomes every moment more deafening. It is neither like thunder, nor like discharges of artillery, nor like anything in heaven or earth but itself. All other terrible noises—even the raging of the sea at its fiercest—are intermittent. But this dread reverberation fills all the space betwixt earth and sky with one solid implacable roar.

Winifred sat motionless; her eyes fixed, her lips white, her hands locked one in the other.

"Dear heart, do not be frightened," Lancelot said, bending forward; "we are in no danger here."

She saw the movement of his lips, and guessed the words.

"Oh, but I *am* frightened!" she said. "It is awful. It is like listening to the voice of God!"

But neither heard a word spoken by the other.

Now the train stops at Torre del Greco. Behind the barrier they see more women; more children; a dog keeping watch over a pile of household goods; a big man wringing his hands and crying like a girl. The guard runs beside the carriages—shouts the name of the station—blows his bugle. But all passes in dumb show; for neither those in the train nor those on the platform hear any sound save the One. Not even the steam-whistle, not even the motion of the engine, is audible.

Portici next. But here is no waiting crowd. Portici is empty. Its streets are deserted; its population has fled. And yonder, suspended above the town, two streams of fire are slowly smoking down the cone. The lava shows crimson in the deepening dusk; creeping, twisting, writhing, lapping mass over mass, with something of a live horror in its motion, as of a reptile in agony.

And now, Portici being left behind, the officer and his companion rise and press to the window at which Lancelot and Winifred are sitting. The air grows thick and sulphurous. A broadening copper glare streams up the sky. The last straggling houses are passed; the last curve is turned; and, as the train enters upon the broad valley between Vesuvius and Naples, comes into sight, suddenly, the whole westward flank of the mountain, its ridged buttresses channelled by innumerable rivers of fire—rivers meeting, mingling, parting, yet all rushing to one common goal; that goal a vast natural platform some three or four hundred feet above the plain. Here they unite, spreading to right and left in one broad lake of fire; and upon the brink of this

awful lake, stationed perhaps a mile apart, like the outposts of a Satanic camp, stand three blazing villages.

Whether purposely, that the passengers might gaze upon this appalling spectacle, or from some other cause, the engine at this point slackens speed, and, without actually standing still, moves at almost a footpace across the valley.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AT THE HOTEL DE ROME.

It was after sunset and nearly dusk, when the train steamed into the station at Naples; for here, to the leeward of the smoke, the natural order of day and dark once more prevailed. Also—the distance between Naples and Vesuvius being about equal to the distance between Vesuvius and Castellamare—the roar of the eruption was so far subdued that to hear and be heard was no longer impossible.

All Naples was out; immense crowds having gathered at every spot from which the mountain was visible. The quay of Santa Lucia was one sea of heads. The housetops, the windows, the balconies, were lined with gazers. The road-way was blocked with carriages. The piers were black with closely-packed human beings. Even the lamp-posts and the trees along the quays, even the yards and rigging of the vessels in the harbour, were covered with spectators.

There is always something impressive in the mere presence of a vast multitude, even though the occasion be joyous, and the multitude disposed to merriment;

but in the sullen silence of these tens of thousands there was a solemnity not to be told in words. Every face wore the same fixed look, and was turned in the same direction.

Then, as now, the Villa di Roma, commonly called the Hotel de Rome, was the best of the few Neapolitan hostelries which commanded a view of Vesuvius. To the Hotel de Rome, therefore—driving slowly, with many stoppages—did Lancelot and Winifred straightway repair. They found that well-conducted establishment in a state of abnormal confusion; the yard full of hack carriages; the landings and passages full of luggage; porters everywhere; waiters nowhere. Here were parties of travellers hurrying away in terror by the evening trains to Capua, en route for Rome; others, attracted by the eruption, just arrived or arriving. Some were clamouring for their bills; others for accommodation. Lancelot, as one of the latter, having with difficulty gained audience of the bewildered landlord, succeeded in securing (upon exorbitant terms) a third-floor apartment overlooking the bay and the mountain,

It was now close upon nine o'clock, and a desultory table-d'hôte dinner which had been dragging its slow length along ever since half-past six, was still going on in the Salle-à-Manger. Never had any of those present sat down to such a dinner. Conversing across the table, they had to speak as loudly as if talking across a street. The windows shook; the glass and silver rattled; the floors trembled. People took their seats, dusty and travel-stained, just as they had come off their journeys. Others went away in the middle of their dinners. Even those who were neither coming nor going laid down their knives and forks every now

and then, and went to the windows to see if there was any change.

Here, being in need of food and rest, Lancelot and Winifred thought themselves fortunate when they got a scared-looking waiter to bring them some cold soup and a dish of languid cutlets.

Presently the door opened, and there entered a tall, thin man, with an eyeglass screwed into his right eye, his hat in his hand, and a lady's shawl upon his arm. He was so very tall that he had to stoop as he passed under the chandelier; and so thin that if, like Peter Schlemiel, he had sold his shadow to the devil, no one would have missed it. Rambling up the room, and looking for a place to his liking, he fixed upon two chairs facing those occupied by Lancelot and Winifred.

"Here—*qui*," he said, eking out his scant Italian with an undue proportion of his native English. "These two—*queste due;* and dinner immediately—do you understand? *Presto—subito*—immediately."

Then, looking across the table, he stared, let the glass drop from his eye, and ejaculated:—

"Eh?—is it possible?——Lord Brackenbury!"

Lancelot rose, and the two men shook hands across the table.

"When I last heard of you," said Lancelot, "you were at Constantinople, and had been at Palmyra. I trust the Countess Castelrosso is well? You do not know my wife? Winifred, this is Mr. Fink, whose name must be familiar to you."

Mr. Fink, bowing profoundly, was seen rather than heard to say that he was enchanted to—to—to have

the honour of—of making Lady Brackenbury's acquaintance.

"We were at Ischia," he said, speaking with that curious mixture of flurry and hesitation which was wont to characterise his utterances; "but we rushed across at the first burst of the eruption. Fearful noise! —impossible to make one's-self heard without bawling. I beg a thousand pardons!"

Saying which, Mr. Fink (having carefully deposited the shawl in one chair and his hat in the other) rambled out of the room again, returning presently with the Countess Castelrosso, who looked as delicately fresh and beautiful, as elegantly flounced, frilled, and clear-starched, as if there were no such horrors as smoke and sulphur in the world.

"For years I have been dying to know you, Lady Brackenbury," she said, when greetings and introductions were over, and they had settled into their places.

"Yes; for years—ever since I became your neighbour. But then, you know, you never called upon me! My husband would not let me call upon you. He told me that it was against the English law, and punishable with transportation for life. But I have heard a great deal about you from Mrs. Pennefeather, and about Langtrey Grange. She tells me it is the most beautiful old timber house in the three counties. We have timber houses in America—real old ones, too; as old, almost, as the time of the Pilgrim Fathers; but then the oldest of ours would, of course, be a thing of yesterday compared with Langtrey Grange."

"My aunt was an old lady," Winifred said, "and we never called upon anyone."

"Mrs. Pennefeather told me you did not care for

society, Lady Brackenbury; and that comforted me. I knew then you were not leaving me out in the cold."

"I hardly know whether we cared for society or not," Winifred replied, simply. "We were very poor; and, not being able to afford it, we never thought about it."

The fair Countess blushed crimson, and, for probably the first time in her life, knew not what to say. According to her creed, ugliness and poverty were the two cruellest ills that flesh is heir to; and she would as soon have thought of taunting an uncomely woman with her uncomeliness as of reminding her new acquaintance of the straitened circumstances of her girlhood. She little dreamed that those four words, "We were very poor," cost Winifred no more annoyance or false shame than she might have felt in saying, "We were very far off," or "We were very much engaged."

Mr. Fink, however, divining his wife's dismay, plunged headlong into the eruption, and turned the conversation.

"You would never guess where we have just come from," he said, making a desperate effort to be audible. "Well, we happen to be acquainted with Signor Melloni, the Director of the Observatory yonder; so we chartered a steamer from Ischia to Portici, and from Portici went direct to the Observatory, where we remained all the afternoon. We saw the lava-stream pour down the Atrio del Cavello, and shape its course for San Sebastiano. Yes, indeed!—a terrific sight! The inhabitants flying for their lives—the vineyards disappearing as the molten mass moved on—then the town reached, crushed, and fired . . . oh, appalling! As for the noise, the heat, the smoke, and the sulphur-fumes,

they were overwhelming. When we came in half an hour ago, you would not have recognized us. We were as black as niggers."

"But you must have been in great danger," said Winifred, turning to the Countess Castelrosso.

"Danger?—none at all, Lady Brackenbury; unless from suffocation. Stationed as the Observatory is on a spur of the mountain—ah! you have not been up Vesuvius? Well, then, imagine yourself standing on the Montanvert, and looking down upon the Mer de Glace; only instead of a fixed torrent of bristling ice, you look down upon a steadily moving stream of red-hot lava! You don't know the Mer de Glace, Lady Brackenbury? How happy you are to have Chamounix yet to come! Do you read Dante? Well, now, do you know, I have a theory about the Inferno; and my theory is that Dante took his notion of the lowest circle from a Swiss glacier, and his circle of fire from an eruption of Vesuvius. He might well have passed through Switzerland or Savoy, when he went to Paris, you know; and as for Vesuvius, there was an eruption in 1306—so Murray says; and in 1306, Dante would have been forty-one years of age. You remember the description of the city of Dis, with its red-hot towers and battlements; and beyond those, the lake of burning pitch? You have only to look out of the window, and there you have the whole scene! How I wish you could have been with us this afternoon! Ah, don't shake your head, dear Lady Brackenbury!—we would have insisted, and you would have gone. There was absolutely no danger. And such a sight!—I would not have missed it for worlds. An awful calamity, of course; but if such a calamity *must* take place—and

Signor Melloni says the crater was full of lava—then we are all wonderfully fortunate to be in Naples at the time."

Winifred looked at her, half doubting whether she really quite liked this brilliant, graceful, voluble creature who seemed so willing to please and be pleased. "Wonderfully fortunate!"—as if anything connected with such a dread catastrophe could be "wonderfully fortunate!" And then all this easy theorising about Dante; and this babble of Switzerland, and Chamounix, and the Mer de Glace!

"How tremendous the reverberations are, even at this distance!" said the Countess. "It is like sitting down to dinner in a besieged city—only more grand and awful. Ah! Lady Brackenbury, you are thinking that I don't know what that is; but you are mistaken. I am familiar with most of the horrors of war. I went through the greater part of the campaign in Texas—in the ambulance service, *bien entendu*. Did you suppose that I shouldered a musket and served in the ranks? Heavens! what an explosion! The eruption is certainly increasing in violence!"

CHAPTER XXX.

FACE TO FACE.

THE sound that evoked the Countess's exclamation was something more than an explosion; it was a shock. A shock so sudden, so violent, that it seemed as if the whole front of the house was being driven in.

Everyone in the room rose, and hurried to the windows.

If they had seen Vesuvius rent from top to bottom, and a sea of lava rushing straight upon Naples, it would scarcely have surprised them. But except that where three villages were blazing awhile ago there now were four, the general aspect of the eruption was not greatly altered.

They all stood waiting; breathless; wondering what would happen next.

"Did you feel the floor heave?"

"Did you hear that cracking noise?"

"It was as if a thunderbolt had burst!"

Then the waiter was questioned. What place was that which had last caught fire? Which was San Sebastiano? Which was Massa di Somma? The man, being confused and unnerved, made such random answers as he could. The fourth fire must be at Pollena, the village next beyond Massa di Somma. That was Massa di Somma in the middle—that was San Sebastiano to the right—lower down the mountain on this side, near Naples, was San Giorgio a Cremano. He could not tell how many inhabitants there were in

San Sebastiano; perhaps two or three thousand. Massa di Somma was a big place—much bigger than San Sebastiano, with three or four times as large a population. But they had all fled. There were no people left in those burning houses. Where were they gone? *Ecco!*—the city was full of them; the ships in the harbour were full of them; the convents, hospitals, barracks and churches were all full of them. Why, the Commissary of Police was here not half-an-hour ago—in the landlord's bureau downstairs—and he was heard to say that fifty thousand refugees had come into Naples within the last twelve hours!

All at once, Mr. Fink looked at his watch, and said that it was half-past nine and time for him to be gone.

Whereupon it came out that, having already watched the descent of the lava from its cradle at the head of that grim ravine between the cone and Monte Somma known as the Atrio del Cavallo, he desired now to trace its further course along the mountain side. He accordingly proposed driving as far as a place called Santa Anastasia, on the north-western slope of Vesuvius, and thence making his way to the brink of the great lava-lake on that upper level, or platform, locally styled "the first plain." For this excursion, he had bespoken the services of the hotel-guide and ordered a light one-horse carretta, which must even now be waiting for him in the courtyard. Would Lord Brackenbury accept the second seat in the carretta, and go with him?

To which Lancelot replied that there was nothing he should like better.

The Countess was charmed. That bad husband

of hers had refused to let her accompany him; and to be left alone in the hotel would have been really horrid. But now it was *autre chose!* Now she should have dear Lady Brackenbury all to herself; and they would watch the eruption together till these gentlemen came back. It would be quite delightful!

Winifred said nothing. Had they been alone, she would have implored her husband not to venture; but she was too young a wife, and too shy, to interpose before these strangers.

Mr. Fink divested himself of his watch, chain, and purse, and gave them into the Countess's keeping.

"Pickpockets and footpads are never particularly rare and curious objects in this part of the world," he said; "and to-night they will be out by thousands. I recommend you, Lord Brackenbury, to do as I am doing."

So, emptying his loose silver into his waistcoat pocket, Lancelot followed Mr. Fink's example.

"You will not run into danger, Lancelot!" whispered Winifred, laying one trembling hand upon his arm.

"No, no, my darling; of course not."

"And you will come back—soon?"

"As soon as I can; but I go as a guest, remember."

He pressed her hands hurriedly between his own. Then Mr. Fink handed him down his hat, and with a brief "good-bye," he was gone.

The invitation was so suddenly given and accepted, and the whole thing passed so rapidly, that Winifred scarcely realised it till she found herself standing with Countess Castelrosso upon a little balcony outside the middle window of the Salle-à-Manger. From hence, they presently saw the carretta emerge from the hotel-

yard—the guide on the box beside the driver; Lancelot and Mr. Fink looking up and lifting their hats as they passed the window. The next moment, carriage and occupants were engulfed in a surging stream of vehicles, and lost to sight.

For a long time the two women stayed there, watching the crowd and the mountain. The atmosphere was as stagnant and oppressive as if they had been standing under the dome of a huge conservatory. The quay below seemed paved with heads. And what with the reflected glare on sea and sky, and what with the light from street-lamps and carriage-lamps and open windows (every house being lit from top to bottom, and every window crowded), the whole outside spectacle was as visible as if seen by the lurid light of a stormy sunset. Vesuvius, meanwhile, looking frightfully near, seemed enveloped in a fiery lacework; while all along that line of fated villages, the flames were distinctly seen stalking from point to point—the houses catching fire one after another, like rows of nut-shells; each house looking for a few moments as if all its windows were illuminated; then blazing up like a bonfire; then crashing in, sending up a shower of sparks, and crumbling to cinders. There was a dreadful fascination about these burning houses which, unseen till overtaken by their doom, started into sight in lines of fire, and vanished by the light of their own destruction.

But Naples—careless, pleasure-loving Naples—could not long be sad, even though the mountain was thundering at her gates, and the lava working its dread will before her very windows. Already the first shock of awe was spent; already the populace had

begun once more to carouse and make merry. The theatres, it is true, were closed, but the wine-shops were open; and as night advanced, the customary hubbub of fiddling, thrumming, singing, and castanet-playing broke out even more madly than usual among the waterside purlieus of the city.

Then a strange incident occurred. In the midst of all this ghastly gaiety, in the midst of all this tumult of wheels, and feet, and voices, and revelry, there came a lull; such a lull as befalls sometimes in the crisis of a tornado. And then, suddenly, there was a flare of torches and a sound of penitential chanting; and there appeared, marching with measured tread, a procession of priests and acolytes. One bore aloft a blackened oil-painting in a tawdry frame; the rest carried torches, and candles, and breviaries. And still, as they approached, followed by a vast concourse of the poorest of the population, the crowd parted, fell upon its knees, burst into shrieks and wailings and lamentations, and swelled with its thousand voices this dolorous litany:—

"Sancto Januario, ora pro nobis!"

They passed; and the procession swept out of sight with its wild following. And then the crowd closed up behind; and the carriages moved on; and the jollity and revelry broke out afresh.

"So Nero sang when Rome was burning!" said Countess Castelrosso. "But, at least, he put on his tragic robes and sang of Troy in flames. These contemptible Neapolitans look upon Vesuvius as a big cracker, let off for their amusement!"

Then, settling herself in an easy-chair by the open

window—for they had now gone upstairs to Winifred's room on the third floor—she added, with a coaxing smile:—

"You are sure you don't mind letting me stay here with you, dear Lady Brackenbury, till our wandering husbands come back?"

"I should go beside myself with terror, if I were alone," Winifred replied. "How long do you think they will be gone?"

"Oh, all night, I daresay."

"All night!"

The Countess laughed.

"Dear Lady Brackenbury, does that horrify you? Think of the distance—think of the state of the roads—the crowds—the confusion—the difficulty."

"And the danger!"

"Oh, as to that, I don't believe there is much danger. One is too apt to talk of the lava as if it were a raging torrent; but it doesn't move very fast, after all. How fast, Lady Brackenbury? Well, perhaps after the rate of a mile, or a mile and a half, an hour—but then something must be allowed for the differences in the ground. Those streams that we see flowing down the cone run faster, of course, than the lava in the Atrio del Cavallo."

"And where do you think they are by this time? Where is Santa Anastasia?"

"Ah, my dear Lady Brackenbury, now you puzzle me! Santa Anastasia is a long way off—far beyond San Sebastiano, and Massa; but although I saw it to-day from the Observatory, I could not give you the least idea of its whereabouts. And as for *ces*

Messieurs, I don't suppose they know where they are themselves!"

After this—the Countess being too tired to talk, and Winifred too anxious—the conversation flagged; and by and by, despite the trembling of the floors and the shaking of the windows, the fair American fell fast asleep.

Still Winifred waked and watched; still the idle world of Naples came and went; while yonder, rushing up from the burning heart of "the great globe itself," rose and fell and overflowed that terrible fountain of fire. A glowing roof of smoke had spread, meanwhile, over plain and bay; and all the sky was reddened, and the houses and the shipping were lighted, and the stars were extinguished, by that lurid canopy which half obscured and half revealed the horrors of the night.

And where were they all this time? The Countess guessed rightly when she conjectured that "*ces Messieurs*" themselves would hardly be able to answer that question. Where, indeed! Driving hither and thither, backwards and forwards, in gloom, and confusion, and haste; starting first for Santa Anastasia by way of the high road, and when within half a mile of Ponticelli, being turned back by a party of mounted carabineers—returning as far as Barra—taking to the by-roads, and making for San Sebastiano—getting so near that they can feel the hot blast off the lava, and see the fire playing in tongues of flame along the vines—then being again driven back by mounted guards—plunging into a labyrinth of lanes—making a long détour for La Cercola, a fifth village, almost down in

the valley, upon which the lava is now fast descending —sticking fast in a "block," of carts and waggons, in some of which whole families are passing the night—alighting and leaving the driver to his fate, with instructions to take the carriage back, if possible, to Barra, to await their return—starting off on foot with the guide, and following their leader across country—clambering over fences and stone walls—dashing recklessly through patches of standing corn—threading the dusky mazes of vineyards and mulberry orchards—coming out into the yards of a deserted farm-house—discovering that they have all this time been bearing too far to the northward—tracking up the bed of a dry torrent—scaling a hill-side planted with ancient olive-trees, and emerging close under the walls of a large building which looms dark against the red glare in the sky. Here, breathless and baffled, they pause to reconnoitre.

"Where the devil are we?" shouts Lancelot, impatiently; and, shout as he may, it is with difficulty that he makes himself heard. "You seem to know as little of the country as we do."

The guide, putting both hands to his mouth, shouts back that this must be the Convent of the Cappuccini.

"What Cappuccini?"

"The Cappuccini of San Lorenzo."

"What is San Lorenzo? A village?"

The guide shakes his head.

"A district. Farms—woods—vineyards. Convent property."

Then pointing higher, he is understood to say that

there is a terrace above, from which the Signori may see the lava, the burning towns, the first plain—everything. Let them follow him.

So, through a tangle of bushes and briars, they climb the last steep bit, and emerge upon a platform outside the convent gates. Here, huddled under the walls, they find a little crowd of fugitive country folk, chiefly women and children, to whom a couple of monks are distributing a dole of food and wine.

Hot, thirsty, tired, the two Englishmen and their guide thankfully accept their share of the charity. Their arrival attracts no attention. Their appearance —though Lancelot has lost his hat, and all three have hands and clothes torn by the briars, and boots cut to pieces by the stones—excites no surprise. Are they not refugees, like the rest?

The convent stands high on the extreme point of a spur of Monte Somma. The plain and city of Naples, the bay from Portici to Ischia, the whole mountain-side, from Santa Anastasia on the east to the Hermitage on the west, are visible from the terrace outside its gates. But to-night one half of that panorama is blotted out in darkness; the other half shut off by a curtain of smoke and fire. For, standing here aloft and in safety, those on the terrace look down upon the whole terrible scene. Yonder from the gates of the Atrio dell Cavallo, pouring forth as from the very mouth of hell, they behold the whole course of that rolling river of lava. Swelled by hundreds of affluents, it spreads to right and left as it rushes out upon the upper plain—it widens into a vast, heaving, red-hot, semi-fluid sea—it spills over in long reaches of fire

which flow down towards the valley, devouring all before them. That river is two miles broad at its widest flowing, and where the suburbs of La Cercola are blazing, the lava has ploughed its way through vineyards six miles from its source.

Even now, as they look upon it, the lava above La Cercola is seen to divide; and, dividing, sends a thin red stream in the direction of the cultivated slopes at the foot of the spur on which the convent stands.

At this sight, a panic-stricken cry goes up from the little crowd upon the terrace. They are all San Lorenzo folk; and when the lava bore down upon La Cercola, they made sure that their own vineyards and olive-woods were safe. Now only Our Lady and the Blessed Saints can save their homes, their crops, their all!

The women fall on their knees, weeping; the men clench their teeth and their fists; the friars stand mute. Their lands are doomed. It is the will of heaven.

Already that thin red stream has widened to a river, and is fast rolling onward. There are no Christian souls under those roofs yonder?—in that homestead beyond the mulberry orchards?—in that house among the vines? Where is Andrea Petrucelli? He was here a moment ago. Where is his brother Gaetano? See! —there they go; racing like madmen down the hillside.

Great God! their mother is at the farm. Their mother, the widow Francesca Petrucelli; their wives; their sisters—all their womenkind.

The next moment, every man who was upon that terrace is rushing down to give what help he can. The guide, hastily binding a handkerchief about his own head, gives his slouch hat to Lancelot. They get along as they can; running, jumping, stumbling over the broken ground. Emerging lower down from the gloom of the olive-wood, they cross the torrent-bed up which they climbed just now. But between this point and the Petrucelli-farm, there is still a mile or more of vineyards.

Mr. Fink follows, incredulous. That people not raving mad should stay in their houses in the face of a peril such as this, seems to him impossible. But Lancelot knows better. Lancelot knows the obstinate fatalism, the blind superstition, with which the Vesuvian peasant clings to his own four walls. He sprinkles his threshold with holy water and believes that the fever cannot pass it, though his neighbours are dying close by. He sets up a little image of the Madonna on his vineyard-fence, confident that the lava will turn aside and spare it.

Meanwhile they plunge on, trampling the green grapes; leaping the boundaries; making straight for the more distant mulberry orchards, beyond which rises a great light, like the light of a forest on fire.

Now they are breathing sulphur and smoke; and now, suddenly, they are looking down upon a burning house, surrounded by stacks, and barns, and outbuildings in flames. Behind those stacks and barns, behind those poplars which look like obelisks of fire, there comes a steadily advancing wave of incandescent lava, red as molten metal, wide as the river Sela in the

plains of Pæstum, higher than twice the height of the tallest man. It comes, neither flowing nor rolling, but unbrokenly, like a moving embankment propelled from behind; unhasting, unresting, irresistible as fate.

But there is no time to gaze—no time to think! Yonder, driven at full gallop, goes a cart crowded with women and children; and here, darting to and fro across the yards, are a number of men (they look like sailors!) saving what they can of household goods and farming implements. The house seems full of fire; but against that end-window stands a ladder.

There is a man at the window! A man with something—a child, surely!—in his arms. He comes down quickly, steadily.

Leaping the last gate at a bound, the two Englishmen make for the open, meeting him half-way.

"Are there still any to be saved?"

A stalwart man, bareheaded, bearded, clasping the rescued child to his breast with one arm, pointing back authoritatively with the other! He seems to say "Go on!" But the roar of the flames and the thunder of the mountain drown all human sounds; and he rushes by unheard.

Unheard, but not unseen; for the light, though only for a second, fell full upon his face.

And Lancelot stands as if struck to stone.

It was grey dawn when Winifred, worn out with watching, fell at last into a troubled sleep. It was grey day—Vesuvius half-hidden under a heavy smoke-cloud, and the savage roar of the eruption subdued to a deep and distant thundering—when she awoke.

"Lancelot!"

Haggard and smoke-blackened, his clothes torn, his hands bleeding and blistered, he stood before her.

"Lancelot!—oh, thank God! Where is Mr. Fink! Where is the Countess?"

"She has this moment left the room. Fink is with her. He is all right—only a little burned and knocked about, like myself."

"Burned? Heavens! where have you been? But you are safe—safe!"

"Oh, yes; we are safe enough. We have been in no real danger; but . . . . Winifred, I have something to tell you."

"Something to tell me? Why do you look like that? You frighten me . . . . what is it?"

He took her hands in his. He dropped his voice to a whisper.

"I have seen him—Cuthbert—my brother—face to face!"

EPILOGUE.

CHAPTER I.

AFTER TWELVE YEARS.

After twelve years—twelve eventful years in the history of the world! Years of war and peace, of gain and loss, of change, and sunshine, and storm. In India, the last fires of the mutiny had been stamped out. In Abyssinia, the taking of Magdala had been followed by the tragic death of King Theodore.

Nearer home, the French and Sardinian armies had won back the Lombard provinces, and Victor Emmanuel had become King of Italy. But the war between France and Prussia, the fall of the Napoleonic dynasty, the rise of the German Empire, were yet to come. On the other hand, some bloodless changes had happened which, although they left the political map of Europe unaltered, may be said in another sense to have revolutionised the map of the whole world. Cities the most distant, nationalities the most diverse, had been brought together by a network of rails and wires; while the Mont Cenis tunnel, the Suez Canal, the Atlantic cable, had abolished the natural boundaries of mountain and desert and sea.

Such, in outline, were the main events that marked the procession of those twelve years across the stage of history. Upon that minor stage occupied by the personages with whose fortunes we are here concerned, no startling changes, whether for good or ill, have meanwhile taken place. With Lancelot and Winifred, the course of true love has run with a smoothness that sets the time-honoured proverb at defiance. Blessed in their home, in their children, in each other, they are happy themselves, and a source of happiness to those around them. Under their beneficent rule, a flourishing colony has sprung up on Burfield Moor. Consisting at first of only the church, schools, vicarage, and about a score of cottages, the new district has, during these twelve years, assumed the aspect of a large, though scattered village; and it numbers a population of some eight hundred souls. It would be too much to say that all the "dark-folk" have become members of this decent community. Many of the old stock are still unreclaimed; and not even Mr. Pennefeather, whose success has already surpassed his own warmest hopes, anticipates that he shall live to see the day when the Plants and Stanways will leave off poaching and pilfering, and settle down into respectable rent-and-tax-payers like the rest. Mr. Pennefeather, it is needless to add, is the most devoted, the most earnest of North-country parsons. That which his hand finds to do, he does with all his might; and his might, both physically and morally, is greater than the might of most men. It is, at all events, adequate to that work which is the labour and the crown of his life.

As for Mrs. Pennefeather, she says herself that she

is too happy. Her children flourish in the free air of the moor; and her two elder boys, having won their scholarships at school, are now graduating at Cambridge. The "baby," long since deposed by newer claimants to that title, is at Rugby. The "baby" is Lady Brackenbury's especial protégé, and owes his school expenses to her bounty. In the meanwhile, Mrs. Pennefeather, having now many sixpences a year to spend as she likes, is, in her way, as active and helpful as Mr. Pennefeather himself. Her way, too, is a very pleasant way. Her sympathies are quick, and she has "a hand open as day for melting charity." It is, after all, not wonderful if her genial nature should command more ready love than the sterner virtues of her husband. She is still, despite time and altered circumstances, Lady Brackenbury's dearest friend; and to Lady Brackenbury she has confided something of the plot of that yet unwritten novel which is to show the world how well she can write under the burden of prosperity.

The Brackenburys, during these twelve years, have lived principally at Brackenbury Court, on their own lands and among their own people. They sometimes travel for a couple of months in the autumn, and it is their habit to spend a few weeks every season at some London hotel; but they have no town house, and not till their children are of an age to go into society, do they propose to indulge in that expensive luxury. The world—or that small, self-constituted body which calls itself the world—wonders why Lord Brackenbury does so little with his wealth. He keeps a sufficient establishment, it is true; he entertains, not extravagantly, but hospitably; he fills his house now and

then for a few weeks with visitors; he subscribes liberally to the hunt and the local charities; but he does not spend his money so freely as "the world" conceives it should be spent by a nobleman with £20,000 a year to his rent-roll. Lord and Lady Everton of Toffee, who, it is well known, are no richer than the Brackenburys, give twice as many dinner-parties; and the princely hospitalities of Mr. Fink and Countess Castelrosso are the glory of the county. Balls, hunt-breakfasts, picnics, garden-parties, private theatricals, are the atmosphere in which that popular couple live and have their being. Who, up in the "north country," ever thought of giving a daylight ball with a dancing-floor laid down upon the lawn, till this beautiful American came from the far west to teach our English country gentlefolk how to enjoy the good the gods provide them? Who ever before invited two hundred people to a Twelfth-Night feast, and entertained them with a Masque of Ben Jonson's in a hall lighted by fifty torch-bearers in the costume of old English beef-eaters? Who ever had the French actors down from London, or engaged a military band a dozen times in the course of the year? Why, asked "the world," why did not the Brackenburys follow this admirable example, and do something really enterprising for society in general?

What the world did not know, and did not even guess, was that Lancelot Brackenbury still looked upon himself as "a steward." A steward he had called himself that evening when Mr. Marrables carried his point, twelve years and more ago; and a steward, in his heart of hearts, he still deemed himself. That more than seventeen years should have gone by

since his brother's disappearance, weighed with him not one jot. Five years after that disappearance, he had seen him—seen him face to face in the flesh. He was alive then; why should he not be alive now? Come what might, Lancelot would never cease to believe that he was living till he knew him to be dead.

It was a subject upon which he and Winifred seldom spoke. His vehemence had so impressed her at the first, that she believed he had in very truth met Cuthbert Brackenbury that night of the great eruption. But when nothing more came of it, and when the Petrucelli family were sought out and questioned, and all questioning proved fruitless—then Winifred began to think that, in the excitement of the moment, her husband had been mistaken. As for Mr. Fink, he treated the whole thing as an illusion. He also saw the man, and he would not admit that there was any ground, however slight, for Lord Brackenbury's *idée fixe*. The man was a big, rough, common-looking man, no more like the lost lord than he was himself like Hercules. So by-and-by, finding that his wife and his only witness were both incredulous, Lancelot dropped the subject, and Winifred hoped after awhile that he had forgotten it. But he never forgot it; and his conviction never wavered.

And now Lancelot and Winifred have been twelve years married; and twelve years and six months have passed since Mr. Marrables prevailed upon Lancelot to prove his brother's will; and seventeen years and one month have gone by since Cuthbert, Lord Brackenbury, bought his diamonds in Genoa and vanished from the high road between Borghetto and La Spezzia.

It is May—the second day of May; and the

Brackenburys are still at Brackenbury Court, though intending to go up to town in the course of another week. Lancelot has been out since half-past five this beautiful fresh May morning, and Lady Brackenbury is walking to and fro on the lawn, outside the breakfast-room windows. Time has dealt tenderly with this Winifred whom the critical Cochrane was fain to admire when she fed her pigeons in the courtyard at Langtrey Grange. More than ever now should she have been painted by that excellent limner, Paris Bordone. Her figure has acquired the graciousness which so especially characterises Bordone's noble Venetian ladies. The red gold in her chestnut hair catches the sunlight as she walks. Her long skirt sweeps after her, like a train. One would like to see her dressed in true Venetian style, in robe of white and gold brocade, with a feather fan in her hand, and a rope of pearls twisted in the loose coils of her hair.

Suddenly, the breakfast-room door is opened, and a gentleman comes across the room, and out through the open window.

"At last!" she says, gladly.

"At last, dearest. You have not waited for me?"

"We waited till nine; and then the boys were so hungry that they would have eaten me, if I had not rung for breakfast. But you must be hungry, too?"

"Tremendously."

"And old Lois?"

"She died about twenty minutes after I got there —quite painlessly and unconsciously. It was a mere ceasing of the breath. No more."

"And she said nothing?"

"She muttered something once; but it was almost inaudible. I fancied I caught the word "fire," and I thought, perhaps, she was dreaming of her grandmother at the stake."

"And—you are disappointed, Lancelot?"

"Well, no," he replies, with an impatient sigh. "Nothing in that way disappoints me now. I expect nothing. I have given up expecting anything. Still, as she had once spoken—years ago—there was just a chance that she might speak again. Anyhow, I am glad I was there when she died."

With this, he looked at his watch, remarked that it was more than half-past ten, and turned back to the breakfast-room.

As he took his seat at the table, the door flew open, and three noisy boys, one carrying a post-bag, burst into the room.

"Incursion of the barbarians!" said Lancelot, laughing. "There, now! don't all talk at once. Well, Cuthbert, what about that pony?"

"I've just been round to the stables, papa. Carter says I mustn't ride him for two or three days; but Sam Leigh has looked at his foot, and so have I, and we don't either of us believe there's anything the matter with it!"

"If Carter says you mustn't ride him, my boy, there is no appeal. Sam Leigh's opinion is worth a trifle less than nothing; and as for you—you are a baby."

"A baby! You call a fellow who was eleven last birthday a baby! Herbert and Wilfred are babies, if you like!"

Whereupon Herbert, aged seven, and Wilfred, aged

five, make an indignant raid upon the buttered toast, and retire laden with spoil.

"We are waiting for papa to open the post-bag," says Lady Brackenbury, pouring out her husband's coffee.

So Lancelot unlocks the bag, and transfers the duty of sorting its contents to his wife.

"Two for Miss Purcell" (Miss Purcell is the younger boys' governess); "three for you, Lancelot; and ever so many—seven, I declare!—for me; to say nothing of papers and pamphlets. Mine look like invitations. Yours look like business — No! this one is in Mr. Cochrane's writing."

Lancelot laid his three letters beside his plate, and went on chatting with his boys and eating his breakfast. Lady Brackenbury, opening her own budget, announced the contents of each letter as she read it.

"From the Frenchays—an invitation to dine on the sixteenth; we shall be gone to town. Afternoon party at the Endells on the ninth—the very day we have fixed for starting. Countess Castelrosso, for the eighth —'to meet the American Minister; a Transatlantic breakfast. Midday.' What does she mean by 'a Transatlantic breakfast?' Well, we have no engagement, and it is sure to be something new and pleasant. Shall I say we will go?"

Lancelot does not answer. The boys have seen a rabbit cross the lawn, and have rushed out with a whoop and a halloo; and now he is looking at his letters. The first he opens is short, and written in a smooth, clear hand. He knows the handwriting well; it is the handwriting of Mr. Gilbert Blake, who is Mr. Marrables' junior and acting partner. The next, from

the same writer, encloses a letter which looks very long and very business-like, and is written on Bath-post paper. All these Lancelot reads in turn, looking grave the while, and somewhat perplexed. His gravity and his perplexity seem to increase as he reads on.

"Your letters do not annoy you, dear?" says Lady Brackenbury, anxiously.

"Well, yes—a little. Marrables wants to see me; and it is a bore to have to go over to Singleton to-day."

"To-day?"

"So he says; if I can spare time to ride across."

"But after being called up this morning at five, and riding fourteen miles before breakfast . . . ."

"Oh, that's nothing!"

"Mr. Marrables' business cannot be very urgent. Why not go to-morrow?"

"It is Blake who writes. He says Marrables will himself be at the office to-day—a rare event, rather; for the old man seldom goes to business now. No; I will go to-day."

Then, noting an enquiring look upon her face, he adds, carelessly:—

"It's about some old claim or other. I don't quite understand it."

"You have not opened Mr. Cochrane's letter yet?"

"By Jove! no—I had forgotten it."

And so he opens his third letter; from which, as he unfolds it, a couple of newspaper cuttings fall out.

"What have we here, I wonder?"

But at the first printed words which meet his eye, his face flushes darkly. He crushes them in his hand;

glances through the letter; thrusts them all together into his pocket; and, rising hastily, says:—

"Don't ask me about Cochrane's letter, Winifred—at least, not now. It's all about town talk and club scandals—neither amusing nor edifying."

"I don't care in the least for town talk or club scandals," replies Lady Brackenbury, smiling; "and I never desire to know anything that you would rather not tell me. Am I not the best of wives?"

"The best in the world!—but then you have the best of husbands."

"I know, at all events, that I have a husband who never keeps a real secret from me."

Then Lancelot rings for Church—the same grave and reverend Church—and sends word round to the stables that he will have "Duchess May" saddled immediately.

His shortest way to Singleton lies under The Ridge, past Abel Brunt's cottage, and through those same green lanes in which Winifred met Lettice Leigh the day after old Miss Langtrey was buried. How all things have changed since then! The cottage, no longer a ruin, is a comfortable dwelling, inhabited by one of the Brackenbury gamekeepers; and Abel Brunt's ghost is as dead as himself. Lettice Leigh has taken Joan's place at Langtrey Grange, where Bridget (now very old and infirm) reigns with undivided sway as housekeeper and care-taker. "Little Sam," a strapping lad of sixteen, is in Lancelot's service as a stable-help at the Court; and Joan, married to the Danebridge blacksmith, is the mother of seven sturdy boys and girls.

But Lancelot is thinking of his letters, and not of

the flight of time; and presently, when he comes to the green lanes, he lets "Duchess May" drop into a walk, while he reads them all again.

First come the two from Mr. Blake.

No. 1.

"Singleton, May 1, 18—.

"DEAR LORD BRACKENBURY,

"Mr. Marrables requests me to say that he would be glad to confer with you upon a matter of business when convenient. He would have the pleasure of waiting upon you, but that the business, he conceives, will be better discussed at our office. If you will kindly name an early day, my partner will come into Singleton to meet you.

"I am, dear Lord Brackenbury,

"Yours faithfully,

"GILBERT BLAKE.

"To Lord Brackenbury."

No. 2.

"Singleton, May 1, 18—.

"DEAR LORD BRACKENBURY,

"Since I wrote you this morning, I have received the enclosed communication from Messrs. Fawcett, Clarke, and Fawcett. As the matter to which Mr. Marrables had proposed to draw your attention seems to be assuming graver proportions, I think it would be well if you could favour us with a visit to-morrow, the 2nd inst. In the hope that it may be convenient to you to come over here, Mr. Marrables will be at the office between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m.

"We regret being obliged to break so delicate a matter to you by letter; having fully intended to reserve the disclosure of the business in hand for a *viva voce* explanation.

"I may add that, although we had heard some singular reports, and knew that Messrs. Fawcett, Clarke, and Fawcett were busying themselves in the matter, this is the first direct communication we have received from the firm.

"I am, my dear Lord Brackenbury,

"Yours faithfully,

"GILBERT BLAKE.

"To Lord Brackenbury."

"Singleton, May 1, 18—.

"DEAR SIRS,

"We have received instructions to address to you, as solicitors to the Brackenbury family, a communication which will doubtless be a matter of as much surprise to you as in fact the circumstances caused to ourselves when we received instructions in the matter. The disappearance and supposed death of Cuthbert Lord Brackenbury seventeen years ago, have now been accepted as fact for so long a time that at first sight we could hardly credit what we are now in a position to announce to you as a matter of certainty—namely, that he is alive and in England. The documentary evidence which he has placed in our hands, comprising various letters from Miss Winifred Savage (to whom his lordship was formerly engaged in marriage); letters from his steward, his brother, and other friends; the diary which he kept of his travels on the continent up to the time when he was supposed to be lost; including hotel-bills and various memoranda (besides an inventory of certain diamonds and other important papers), places his identity beyond doubt; and we therefore submit the proposal we are instructed to make before his brother through you with every confidence that it will be accepted.

"We have to explain in the first instance that Lord Brackenbury's object is not to disturb the existing arrangements. At the time when he was supposed to have fallen into the hands of brigands, he had in fact taken steps to indulge his taste for a wandering life, and has since that time

been travelling in different parts of the world. He had purchased some valuable diamonds shortly before his disappearance; and upon the proceeds of this purchase he has been living up to the present time.

"We are instructed to address this communication to your client in a friendly spirit, and although our client is in a position to claim his estates and dignities, he wishes us to convey to you the assurance that such is not his intention. As however he has expended during his travels the greater portion of the money which he derived from the sale of the diamonds, he finds himself in need of further supplies, and is reluctantly obliged to apply to his brother for a portion of that property of which he might, if he thought well, claim the whole. We are instructed therefore to inform you that if your client will place £25,000 at his brother's disposal, that sum will meet all his needs; and having received it, he will disturb him no further.

"You will of course accept this letter as without prejudice in case the proposal we have made is not accepted.

"We are, dear Sirs,

"Yours truly,

"FAWCETT, CLARKE, AND FAWCETT.

"To Messrs. Marrables and Blake."

So much for Mr. Blake's letters, and for the astounding communication from Fawcett, Clarke, and Fawcett. This last he reads twice over, and each time with more pain and more wonder. Then he goes through Cochrane's note once more.

"Imperator Club, May 1, 18—.

"MY DEAR BRACKENBURY,

"I have been thinking of writing to you for the last week but though I have twice taken up my pen to do so, I have twice laid it down again—not knowing, in truth, how to put

the thing I wanted to say. To-day, however, my attention having been called to a paragraph in *The Court Herald* (which I enclose), I feel I should be wanting in my duty as a friend if I kept silence longer. The *Tocsin* cutting appeared some few days ago.

"As those concerned are always the last to hear reports of this kind, I conclude you know nothing about these ridiculous rumours which, I am sorry to say, have been flying about town for the last ten days or so. I would suggest your writing a few lines at once (for publication) to the editor of *The Court Herald*. As for *The Tocsin*, it is such a scurrilous print, and so little read in decent society, that it would perhaps be better left unnoticed.

"I am truly sorry, my dear friend, to be such a disagreeable correspondent, but I thought you ought to know what is going on.

"Ever yours,

"HORACE COCHRANE.

"To the Lord Brackenbury."

"P.S.—Cuttings enclosed":—

From "*The Court Herald*," *May* 1, 18—.—"It is confidently rumoured that Lord B———y, whose extraordinary disappearance under very suspicious circumstances was the talk of Europe some seventeen years ago, has re-appeared to claim his title and estates. The claim is likely to be disputed; and Lord B———y has, we understand, put his case into the hands of an eminent (north-country) legal firm."

From "*The Tocsin*," *April* 26, 18—.—"Another chapter is about to be added to the Romance of the Peerage. Lord Brackenbury, who was lost on the Riviera with £30,000 worth of diamonds about his person on the 18th of April, 18—, proves to have been, after all, neither robbed nor murdered. Yielding to an ill-regulated taste for a nomadic life, he has, it would appear, spent his time and his money in wandering 'from Indus to the Pole;' but, weary

of this vagabond existence, is shortly about to resume his place in society. That place, however, has for many years been filled by the present peer, his lordship's brother and heir presumptive, who will hardly vacate it without a struggle. The lawyers, it is said, are making active preparations on both sides."

CHAPTER II.

"THERE ARE THREE RICHMONDS IN THE FIELD."

"I WISH we could have settled this unpleasant business without troubling you, my Lord," said Mr. Blake.

Lancelot, looking pale and anxious, drew his chair to the table, and took from his pocket the letters and enclosures which he had that morning received from the firm.

"Oh, but that would have been impossible!" he replied.

"Yes—having Fawcett and Clarke to deal with."

"That is what troubles me!" said Lancelot. "I cannot conceive why he should have gone to Fawcett and Clarke—or to any lawyer at all. Why did he not come to me, or write to me, himself?"

"I don't quite understand," said Mr. Marrables. "Of whom are you speaking?"

"Of Cuthbert—of my brother. Whom else?"

Mr. Marrables and his partner exchanged looks of profound astonishment.

"But—but, my dear friend," said the little lawyer, "you don't surely suppose for a moment that this is anything but a case of imposture?"

"It is no imposture."

"Excuse me; if your brother were really living" .....

"My brother is living."

Again the partners looked at each other. They knew neither what to think, nor what to say.

The old gentleman—dapper still, though betraying his added years by a dimmed look in the eye, a drooping of the wrinkled eyelid, a tremulousness of the hand—took off, and wiped his glasses.

"When you say, my dear lord, that the late Lord Brackenbury is still living, you mean, I presume, that you still cherish an inward hope and conviction to that effect?"

"I mean that I know he is living; that I have seen him, face to face."

"Seen him? God bless my soul! This is most extraordinary. When and where did you see him? Not at Fawcett and Clarke's?"

Lancelot shook his head.

"No," he said, gloomily. "Not in England—not now. Twelve years ago; when I was in South Italy, about two months after our marriage. It is a long story; but I will make it as short as I can."

Then he told them about that day at the old villa, and about that night on the slopes of Vesuvius; and he said how, not seeing his brother's face the first time, he did not dare to feel certain; but, meeting him that second time, he was convinced beyond possibility of doubt.

The lawyers listened attentively; the younger man pencilling a few notes from time to time; the elder partner now and then interrupting with a question.

"In a naval uniform, did you say?"

"Well, you can't call a gold band and brass buttons a 'uniform.'"

"More the style of a mate on board a P. and O., or an Austrian Lloyd's steamer?" suggested Mr. Blake.

"Yes; just that."

"And the second time?" asked Mr. Marrables. "How was he dressed the second time?"

"Ah, that I can't tell you! I looked only at his face."

"But there were a number of seamen, you said, giving assistance to the inhabitants of this farm-house. Was he one of them?"

"That is what I don't know. The widow Petrucelli, it seems, had a relation who was master of a merchant vessel lying in harbour at the time; and it was his men whom we saw about the yards."

"You sought the vessel out, afterwards?"

"I sought out the Petrucelli family, consisting of a widow with ever so many sons and daughters and grandchildren. They had taken refuge with friends at a place about sixteen miles from Naples. I had the greatest difficulty to trace them; but, of course, when I did find them, I asked all the questions I could think of. Their relative's vessel, however, was by that time gone off upon a cruise; and they assured me that there was no one in the least answering to my description of Cuthbert among the crew."

"But—excuse me for cross-examining you—when you saw this man, as you say, face to face, why did you not stop him? Why did you not speak to him?"

"How could I delay, while there were still human beings in that house upon which the lava was advancing? As it was, I hesitated. I felt for a moment as if I *must* follow him! And you will remember, if I had spoken, he would not have heard me. He evidently spoke to me; but I did not hear a sound."

"If you recognized him, why should not he have recognized you?"

"Well, I had lost my hat some minutes before, and the guide had given me his—a great slouch that protected my eyes, but disguised me completely."

"And were there actually people in the house?"

"There was one man—a tramp—to whom, among others, the Petrucelli had given shelter for the night; for everyone believed, you know, that La Cercola and San Lorenzo were as safe as Naples itself. The fellow was lying in a dead stupor—drunk, I believe—in a sort of hayloft; all the rest having escaped. We got him out somehow—Fink and I—but it was a hard matter; and the roof fell in a minute or two afterwards."

"You may just note, Mr. Blake, that each time my lord believed that he recognized his brother, there were seamen present," said Mr. Marrables.

"Each time; and when you remember Cuthbert's passion for the sea . . . ."

"Ah! but, my dear friend, I don't believe it was he, any more than I believe in this client of Messrs. Fawcett and Clarke!"

"I tell you, Marrables, that I am positive—as positive as of my own identity!"

"But the motive, my dear friend—the motive for this long disappearance."

"The motive? God knows! We hear of men who disappear and let their families mourn them for dead; and who have apparently no other motive than a desire to begin life afresh, and to throw off the trammels of society."

"When a man of culture and refinement does that sort of thing, it generally means that he has contracted a low marriage," said Mr. Blake; "and that is a folly

which would never have been committed by the late Lord Brackenbury."

"You told us, I think, that there was a lady with this man?" said Mr. Marrables, enquiringly.

"That day at the villa—yes."

"And she looked like a lady?"

"I think so."

Mr. Marrables stroked his chin, and then said, smiling:—

"There are three Richmonds in the field."

"Three Richmonds?"

"There is the man whom you saw at the villa; there is the man whom you saw the night of the eruption; and there is Messrs. Fawcett and Clarke's claimant. Now, my dear friend—a moment's patience! The man you saw at the villa, accompanied by a lady, wore a kind of uniform, and commanded a boat's crew. Richmond the First. The man you saw the night of the eruption was either a chance looker-on, who made himself useful, as you did, or he was a common seaman or peasant. Richmond the Second. Finally, we have the man who, according to Fawcett and Clarke, has led a wandering life, spent his money, and wants twenty-five thousand pounds. This gentleman is evidently neither of the previous Richmonds. He is Richmond the Third."

"Then, Marrables, you refuse to accept my positive testimony—the testimony of my own eyes?"

"I think your mind was pre-disposed to receive a certain impression, and that you were in both instances mistaken. However, be this as it may, the present question is how to deal with Richmond the Third."

Then they discussed this question of dealing with Richmond the Third, and with Richmond the Third's legal advisers. Fawcett and Clarke's letters mentioned certain proofs of identity which had been lodged in their hands. To examine these proofs, and to obtain a personal interview with their client, were obviously the first steps which should be taken. Upon these points, Lancelot and his lawyers were agreed. It was accordingly settled that Messrs. Marrables and Blake should write to Messrs. Fawcett and Clarke, expressing Lord Brackenbury's willingness to meet their client and examine his proofs of identity at such time and in such place as might best suit that gentleman's convenience.

Then Lancelot rose to go; but stopped half-way to the door, and pulled a letter from his pocket.

"Look here," he said, "I had forgotten to show you this. It is from my friend Cochrane. Tell me what you think of it."

Mr. Marrables received it with the deference due to a letter written by the Conservative representative of the borough of Singleton; but his face was grave when he laid it down.

"It is a base plot," he said; "a base and a deep-laid plot; and they mean fighting."

"But those paragraphs from '*The Tocsin*' and '*The Court Herald*'?"

"Written in Fawcett and Clarke's office."

"Good heavens!—why? If it be true—if it be only true—he has but to come to me, to put out his hand, and all I have is his! Twenty-five thousand pounds? What are twenty-five thousand pounds compared with what I owe him? You know how little I

have spent of his money, Marrables; you know how it has accumulated, and to what an enormous total it has mounted during these seventeen years. It is all his. The estates are all his; the title is his—he has but to claim them!"

"And he would come to you—he would put out his hand, if it were he! Remember the affection that subsisted between your brother and yourself . . . . ."

"I do remember it—that is what cuts me deepest!"

"—Look at the antecedents of Fawcett and Clarke; think of Stephen Langtrey's ruin and death; and then ask yourself if the late lord would ever have put himself into their hands. Is it credible? Is it possible? My dear Lord Brackenbury, does not your own excellent sense show you that your beloved brother would never have acted in this fashion, and that the very course pursued by Fawcett and Clarke's client proves him to be an impostor?"

Lancelot paused; drew a deep breath, and said:—

"Upon my soul, Marrables, I begin to think you are right. Invite the man to meet me; and we will soon see whether he is an impostor or not."

"I will invite him with pleasure," said Mr. Marrables. "Or rather, I will invite Fawcett and Clarke to invite him. But he will not come."

CHAPTER III.

MR. MARRABLES TELLS A LIE.

HAD Mr. Marrables been the mouthpiece of the Delphic oracle, he could not have prophecied more correctly. "I will invite him with pleasure," he said; "but he will not come."

He did invite "him," and in these terms:—

"Singleton, May 2nd, 18—.

"DEAR SIRS,

"We have received your favour of the 1st inst., and have communicated with our client in reference to the claim made by you on behalf of a gentleman whom you state to be his brother. It appears to us that if your client is really the person he represents himself to be, his identity can be established beyond possibility of doubt at a personal interview with ours; and if so, all arrangements for the future are matters for discussion, not between the legal advisers of the parties, but between the brothers themselves. We have, therefore, to invite you to make an appointment for a meeting of the parties concerned. The gentleman under whose instructions you are acting will thus have every facility to establish his identity. It will perhaps be convenient to arrange this meeting at our office on an early day next week.

"We are, dear Sirs,

"Yours truly,

"MARRABLES AND BLAKE.

"To Messrs. Fawcett, Clarke, and Fawcett."

To which courteous invitation Messrs. Fawcett, Clarke, and Fawcett, after two days' delay, returned the following reply:—

"Singleton, May 5th, 18—.

"DEAR SIRS,

"We duly received yours of the 2nd inst., which we have laid before our client. We regret that you should deem it necessary to propose a personal interview, as we cannot but feel that it is unnecessary and would be painful. Our client and his brother have been so long parted, and such great domestic changes have occurred during that time, that our client feels it would be better the meeting should not take place. We shall, however, be happy ourselves to meet you, and, if you think fit, your client, whenever you please; and we are satisfied we can place documentary evidence of identity before you which will remove any doubt from the mind of yourselves or your client. Having regard, however, to the fact that our client prefers not to resume his rank and position, but to leave England as soon as possible, we think it desirable that he should retain his incognito, and that the transaction should take place with the strictest regard to privacy. We need hardly add that our client has not the least wish to have recourse to a public Court of Law; but, if his very moderate requirements are provided for in the manner we propose, would prefer to leave his brother's present position wholly undisturbed. We shall therefore be happy to attend at your office on Tuesday next, at twelve o'clock.

"We are, dear Sirs,

"Yours truly,

"FAWCETT, CLARKE, AND FAWCETT.

"To Messrs. Marrables and Blake."

Then Mr. Marrables himself wrote to Lancelot, advising that for the present, at all events, Fawcett and Clarke's proposal should be entertained.

"We can but investigate their so-called 'documentary evidence,'" he said, "and thence take whatsoever new departure may seem expedient. In the meanwhile, I may tell you that we believe we have found a clue to the whereabouts of this mysterious claimant, whom I have more than once been tempted to regard as a purely mythical personage. The Fawcetts have a client in Macclesfield with whom they are in daily communication. Frank Fawcett has been over there repeatedly within the last fortnight or three weeks; frequently running up by the morning express, and returning the same night. We sent one of our junior clerks to Macclesfield last evening to find out what he could in the town. He is a sharp fellow, and will not, I think, come back empty-handed."

The next day, Mr. Marrables wrote again.

"Singleton, May 7th, 18—.

"MY DEAR LORD BRACKENBURY,

"The mysterious client at Macclesfield is a Mr. Compton. He is staying at the York Hotel; and, in so far as our clerk could learn, seems to be spending his money pretty freely. He is described as tall, light-complexioned, and about forty-five or forty-seven years of age. I mean to see this gentleman with my own eyes before many days are over. In the meanwhile, I look for the pleasure of receiving you here to-morrow.

"Believe me, my dear Lord,

"Yours faithfully,

"EDWARD MARRABLES.

"To Lord Brackenbury."

Not for many years had Mr. Marrables gone so frequently to the office, or written so many business

letters with his own hand. For, it must be remembered, he was now four score and seven years of age; and, notwithstanding the keenness of his intellect and the extraordinary vigour of his physique, he was in truth a very old gentleman. Old as he was, however, he was not to be daunted by even so serious an undertaking as the journey to Macclesfield and back. Confident that a colossal fraud was to the fore, he felt once more that anticipatory relish with which, in younger days, he was wont to pursue the pleasures of the legal chase.

So, having despatched his note to Lancelot Brackenbury, Mr. Marrables went home behind the gravest of cobs, driven by the steadiest of elderly grooms (for the days of high-stepping greys and frisky Rorys were long since over), and sat down to his bachelor dinner with a somewhat better appetite than usual.

Now it was Mr. Marrables' invariable custom to read for two hours after dinner; and because light reading was good for digestion, he always took a novel with his coffee. He was, in fact, an inveterate novel-reader, and generally had a big box of fiction, either just arrived from, or just departing to, Mudie's. Therefore, when he was comfortably settled in his easy-chair, with slippered feet, and placid mind, and the light of a shaded lamp directed full upon the first page of a certain third volume, Mr. Marrables might well be excused from looking up somewhat impatiently, and answering somewhat irritably, when interrupted with:—

"If you please, sir, there's a gentleman wants to speak to you."

"Confound you, Davis! you know I never see any-

one at this hour. Tell him to go to the office at Singleton any day before five. Mr. Blake will attend to him."

"I have told him so, sir," replied Davis, who was as grave as an undertaker, and had lived with Mr. Marrables for fifty years.

"And he's not gone?"

"No, sir. He says his business is very particular, and he must see you."

"Tell him to go to the devil!"

"I have told him so, sir."

"The deuce you have!"

"Not in those words precisely, sir, but equivalent."

Mr. Marrables laughed.

"Well, go back to him, Davis, and tell him, with my compliments, that I have little or nothing to do now with the business of the firm, but that my partner, Mr. Blake, will attend to him with pleasure. Say it civilly, mind."

"Yes, sir; but he won't take No for an answer."

"At all events, don't bring me another message."

Davis vanished; but re-appeared immediately.

"If you please, sir, the gentleman says he is a very old friend, and he knows you will be glad to see him."

"What's his name?"

"Won't give it, sir."

"Did you ask him for his card?"

"Won't give it, sir."

Mr. Marrables hesitated. He felt decidedly cross; and yet he could not help also feeling curious.

"Tell him to come up, and be hanged to him!"

he said, his curiosity getting the better of his crossness.

Then he shut his book, got upon his feet, and resolved not to invite this unwelcome guest to be seated.

The door opened, and he came in; a tall, powerful, light-bearded man, in an overcoat and a felt hat. He took off his hat as he crossed the threshold; walked to the middle of the room; lifted the shade off the lamp, and said:—

"Mr. Marrables, do you know me?"

The colour fled from Mr. Marrables' rosy face. He stared at the stranger, and said nothing.

"Mr. Marrables," his visitor repeated, "do you know me?"

Then Mr. Marrables, for the first time in his life, told a lie. He said:—

"No."

"Your looks say 'Yes,' my old friend. Why does your tongue say 'No'?"

Again Mr. Marrables was silent.

"Look once more. Have seventeen years so changed me? Is it possible that you don't even recognize my voice? I am Cuthbert Brackenbury."

Mr. Marrables, trembling from head to foot, dropped into his easy-chair.

"I—I presume," he said, trying to speak with cold composure—"I presume I have the honour of speaking to Mr. Compton—from Macclesfield."

"Compton from Macclesfield? What do you mean? I tell you I am Cuthbert Brackenbury! What is this about my brother and the property? I saw it only four days ago in the *Fanfulla*. The Italian papers are full

of it. I had but just come ashore at Trieste, and in the first café I entered, there I read it! I started for England next morning, and here I am. Is it true? Is his title disputed? And on what grounds? And by whom?"

"Is it not—you—who dispute it?" stammered Mr. Marrables.

"I? Are you mad? The *Fanfulla* speaks of a pretender to the title—is there any such pretender? If so, he is an impostor, and I am here to unmask him."

Mr. Marrables almost gasped for breath; then, half laughing, half crying, he stretched out both his hands, and said:—

"Cuthbert, my dear boy, forgive me! I recognized you the moment you came into the room. God bless you!"

Then, for some minutes, their talk was all broken exclamations, half-finished sentences, eager questions and rapid answers.

"And you thought I was dead? Everyone thought so, did they not? And Lancelot?"

"Lancelot did not believe it for years—I doubt, in fact, if he ever really believed it, though he yielded at last to necessity and took the title. After that, he fancied he saw you . . . ."

"Saw me?"

"Ay, about twelve years ago, in South Italy. First, at the house where you lived as boys . . . ."

"Ah!"

"Next, during the great eruption of Vesuvius, coming out of some burning house at——I forget the name of the place . . ."

"San Lorenzo! Yes, I was there, with some of my crew. It was at a farmhouse belonging to my wife's relations, and we were saving what we could."

"You are married, then?"

"Yes."

"And in the Navy?"

"I am a ship-owner, and the captain of a merchant vessel—rich for my station in life—active—happy. Enough of me. Tell me about Lancelot!"

"Your brother is also married," said Mr. Marrables, with some embarrassment.

"I know it. He is married to Winifred. I saw it in the papers. I thought they would have married sooner. They waited four years."

"Oh! then you expected . . ."

"I knew he loved her, of course; and I knew she loved him."

"And that was why . . ."

"Why I went away? Well, it was one of my strongest motives, but not the only one. I hated my life in England. I was sick of society, and of the dismal round of visiting, dining, shooting, listening to speeches, and yawning in club-windows. I could not breathe here. I pined for liberty. And when I had made sure that liberty for myself meant happiness to the two people who were dearest to me in the world... Well, I cut the Gordian knot, and took my fate in my own hands. But tell me about Lancelot. Is he well? Is he happy? Have they children?"

To which Mr. Marrables replied that they were the happiest pair he had ever known, out of a novel; and that they were the parents of three splendid boys, the eldest of whom was named Cuthbert, after his lost uncle.

"And he is like you, too," added the little lawyer. "He is the only fair one—the others are both dark, like their father."

"God bless him—and them. My namesake, too! I long to see him!" said Lord Brackenbury, with emotion.

Mr. Marrables looked at him.

"And you?" he said, anxiously. "Have you also a family?"

"One little daughter—very delicate. That is my only earthly trouble. His children are all healthy?"

"As young savages."

"And he still paints?"

"He not only paints, and paints well; but his pictures sell for good prices—which, I take it, is a sound test of their merit. He has two in this year's *Salon*."

"One of those must be mine, if they are not both sold already. And now, what about these rumours in the papers?"

"One question first, to satisfy an old man's curiosity?" said Mr. Marrables. "How did you manage to disappear that night after you got out of the carriage?"

Lord Brackenbury smiled.

Very easily, he said; so easily that he only wondered why no one had hit upon the truth. Mr. Marrables would remember that he stayed several weeks in Genoa. Well, while in Genoa, instead of hiring a yacht, he bought a boat—a rickety old skiff, which he could sail or row as he pleased. He used to be out for hours on the water daily; sometimes with a boy to steer; sometimes alone. Oftenest alone. In this boat, he explored the coast between Genoa and La Spezzia; and, having found out a little creek in a

lonely spot under the cliffs, about a mile and a half north of La Spezzia, he decided to make that his point of departure. To stock the boat with a little food and fresh water, some sand for ballast, and a change of clothing such as a rough seaman might wear, was easy enough. Not quite so easy was it to get the boat off; to leave it hidden and ready in that little creek; to find his own way up the cliffs and through the woods, avoiding observation till he reached the post-road and overtook the Diligence, by which he returned late, that same night, to Genoa. This done, the rest was all plain sailing.

He alighted from the yellow calèche at precisely the nearest spot to the point for which he was bound; and, long enough before those at the Croce di Malta set out to look for him, he was sheltering in his boat under a tarpauling, waiting only for the violence of the storm to subside, that he might put out to sea. When by and by the wind fell and the sky cleared, he changed his clothes, pushed his boat off, set his little sail, and ran before the breeze half-way back to Genoa. Happily, the wind veered round to the north about dawn of day; and then, keeping well out to sea, and with no other aid than a map and a pocket-compass, he made direct for the little island of Gorgona, which lies about twenty miles to the S.W. of Leghorn, and rather more than forty from La Spezzia. Here, with some tacking and difficulty, (having sunk his own clothing in a bag weighted with sand), he landed safe and sound, after two nights and two days in an open boat. Passing as a Genoese fisherman, he then remained at Gorgona till the end of July, taking employment in the anchovy-fishing, and earning his weekly

wage like any other of the "chance hands" who run across from the mainland at that season. Thence, having sold his boat, he went on to Corsica and Sardinia; and, by and by, crossed from Cagliari to Corfu, and from Corfu to Brindisi.

All this he did in pursuance of a fixed plan; that plan being to purchase a merchant-vessel, and take up, for good and all, with the life of an ocean-trader.

"And have you no home on terra-firma?" asked Mr. Marrables, when so much was told.

But Lord Brackenbury, instead of replying to this question, went back to the subject of his first enquiries.

Then Mr. Marrables stated all he knew, and showed him copies of the correspondence between himself and the firm of Fawcett and Clarke.

"And there is really a claimant?"

"So it seems—the man calling himself Compton, and putting up in Macclesfield. Now, if he has actually placed in Fawcett and Clarke's hands the papers named in their letter, and if those papers are genuine, how did he come by them? Where were all those letters and bills, where were those inventories of the diamonds, when you left your travelling-carriage?"

"In my black bag, on the floor, beside where I was sitting."

"You are sure of that?"

"As sure as that I am here. I left them there on purpose."

"And you took nothing with you?"

"Nothing but the diamonds and money in my belt, and two small miniatures—Lancelot's and my mother's."

"Can you remember whether there were any other letters in the bag, besides your brother's and Lady.... I mean, Miss Savage's?"

"Yes; there were some from Mellor. Dead? poor fellow! I am sorry to hear that. One from Sir Reginald Barker, about a carriage-horse; one, if not two, from yourselves—Marrables and Blake; and all my hotel bills, from the time of leaving England. I shall remember more, I daresay, when I have time to think about it."

"These things must have been stolen from your bag between the time of your leaving the carriage, and the arrival of your brother at La Spezzia!"

Lord Brackenbury considered for a moment; then, with his gravely ironical smile, he said:—

"I know now who the gentleman is. He is my man, Prouting."

Half an hour later, when their plan of operations was concerted, Mr. Marrables scribbled a note to Lancelot, telling him that the meeting was unavoidably postponed, and begging him to make no kind of move, meanwhile, in the matter. To Fawcett and Clarke, he also wrote a line to say that, being himself unable to go to Singleton to-morrow, he trusted it would not inconvenience these gentlemen to defer their visit till Wednesday at the same hour.

"And now, my dear friend," said the little lawyer, "I will do what I ought to have done long since—order your supper to be prepared and your bed-room to be got ready."

But Lord Brackenbury wanted neither food nor lodging. He had put up at the Railway Inn at Sand-

bach, where the people were all new, and nobody was likely to recognise him; and at Sandbach he had hired a horse, and so ridden over. The horse awaited him in the stables of the village-inn close by.

"We had better meet to-morrow at Macclesfield," he said, "and go together to the York Hotel. One thing is certain—that, once having taken possession of Mr. Compton, we must not lose sight of him for a moment."

"And having taken possession of him—having brought him here, let us say, in readiness to be produced on Wednesday—what do you yourself propose to do?" asked Mr. Marrables.

"I?"

"You—you yourself—Cuthbert, Lord Brackenbury. You do not, I presume, intend to resume your title and estates?"

Lord Brackenbury frowned.

"I mean to confirm my brother in both, to the utmost of my power."

"In what way?"

"You must tell me in what way. I am ready to make any declaration, to sign any paper, that may be desirable and necessary."

"And are you so little learned in legal matters that you think you can do this thing? You are not a King, my dear friend, that you can, at your pleasure, abdicate in favour of the next heir. You are a peer of Great Britain—a member of the legislature; one whose functions are strictly hereditary, and who has no power to relegate those functions to another."

"Is that so, Marrables?"

"That is absolutely so. In so far as the estates go, you can—there having been no re-settlement—release them to your brother; but Baron Brackenbury you are, *nolens volens*, and Baron Brackenbury you remain, till the title passes at your death to the next in succession."

Lord Brackenbury looked down; put his hand over his mouth; and sat silent.

"If you wish your brother Lancelot to retain his name and station," continued Mr. Marrables, with a solemnity of manner that was the more impressive because so unusual, "then to him you must remain for ever dead. Knowing you to be alive, he could neither bear your title nor transmit it to his eldest son. He would have no right to sit, or to vote, as a peer. If he did so, he would be guilty of a fraud—dishonoured in his own eyes, and, if discovered, disgraced in the eyes of the world."

"I had not thought of this," said Lord Brackenbury, in a low voice. "What would you have me do?"

"I would have you keep out of sight altogether. To the man Prouting you must reveal yourself—for that there is no help; but he is utterly in our power, and must do what we choose. He shall make full confession of his guilt; but he shall not betray that you are living. We will make that condition the price of his pardon—otherwise we hand him over to the tender mercies of the law, and he gets, in all probability, seven years penal servitude. In the meanwhile, Marrables and Blake must for once be credited with even more than their due share of legal acumen. We must be

supposed to have found it all out, through our own sharpness."

"But this, after all, is a half-measure. It seems to me that we are simply scheming to keep a secret; and that Lancelot's position is as uncertain as ever."

"You can release the estate to your brother, absolutely; and without his knowledge."

"Of course, I will do that."

"And lest it should some day be necessary to produce evidence for the security of his title, you can leave a written statement in our hands—a statement in full of all that you have told me to-night and of as much more as may be needful, showing how you went away of your own act and deed, the date and particulars of your marriage, and that you are without heirs male of your body (whose interests would prejudice the interests of Lancelot's children); and this statement, sealed with your seal, can lie at our office till your death; not even then being delivered to your heirs, unless under pressure of some great emergency."

"Yes; I will do that also."

"But then we must know where you live, in case it be necessary to communicate with you; and you must provide that your executors over yonder give our firm due notice of your decease."

Lord Brackenbury nodded.

"And if at any time you become the father of a son . . . . ."

"That will never be, my good friend. The birth of our little girl very nearly left me a widower; and my wife, I am told, will never be a mother again."

Mr. Marrables drew a deep breath. "Then our

last and greatest difficulty vanishes into thin air," he said. "I regret the fact for your sake, my dear Lord Brackenbury; but I do not pretend to deny that it relieves my mind of a very serious burden."

"Don't call me 'Lord Brackenbury,' Marrables," said the other. "I have done with that name for ever. I am Cesare Donato, of the Italian merchant-service, and captain of the brig *Diamante*."

CHAPTER IV.

"GOOD-BYE, LANCELOT!"

LANCELOT'S mind was full of troubled thoughts, as he rode over to Singleton on the Wednesday morning. As yet, following Mr. Marrables' counsel and the promptings of his own good sense, he had told Winifred none of these things; but he now began to feel that it would not be easy to preserve silence much longer. Let it only be ascertained that this Mr. Compton who was "spending his money pretty freely" at Macclesfield, and the mysterious claimant, were one and the same, he too must see the man with his own eyes. But how should he go to Macclesfield without assigning some reason for the expedition? Would it not be better to tell all to his wife, and to tell it at once, before rumours should reach her from without? He never saw Winifred open a letter now, or take up a newspaper, without an uneasy dread of its possible contents.

Arrived at Marrables and Blake's office, he found the two Fawcetts already drawn up in order of battle. Old Clarke now survived only in the name of the firm; Francis Fawcett had become a middle-aged man; but Fawcett senior, thanks to his toupée, his hair-dye, and his teeth, looked hardly any older than when he paid his memorable visit to Langtrey Grange. If his figure and complexion betrayed, perchance, a too self-indulgent habit of life, his hand, at all events, was as well-shaped, and his smile as conspicuous, as ever.

A black bag stood beside him on the table. From

this bag, after due preliminaries, he brought out some five or six bundles of letters and papers.

"We have the honour," he said, in his florid way, "to submit to you, gentlemen, on the part of our client, Lord Brackenbury . . . ."

"I beg your pardon," Mr. Marrables interrupted, promptly. "I protest against that application of our client's name and title."

Mr. Fawcett coughed, and smiled significantly.

"We have the honour to submit to you, gentlemen, firstly, a packet of letters from his lordship's brother, the Honourable Lancelot Brackenbury, now present; secondly, a packet of letters from the lady who was then Miss Winifred Savage; thirdly, a packet of business letters from the late Mr. Joseph Mellor, who was at that time his lordship's steward and agent; fourthly, a packet of miscellaneous correspondence (including a letter, gentlemen, from yourselves, signed Marrables and Blake); fifthly, a parcel of hotel-bills duly receipted, beginning with the Lord Warden Hotel, Dover, from which point his lordship started, and ending with bills contracted at the Hotel Feder, Genoa, where he was staying when he made his famous purchase of the diamonds. Lastly,—and these documents are of great importance—various papers connected with the sale and purchase of the said diamonds; namely, the Avvocato Morro's formal receipt for the sum of £31,000 sterling; the original inventory of the jewels; and a list of the stones when unset and classified according to size and weight. This last list in his lordship's own handwriting. We have also a mass of private memoranda, small bills, and the like; as well as a cigarette-case which your client will probably recognize."

Lancelot did recognise it, instantly—a little Russia-leather case mounted in silver, which he had himself given to his brother not long before they parted. He then took up the first packet, consisting of his own letters; opened them one by one; scrutinised dates and post-marks, and passed them on in silence to Mr. Marrables. Next he examined the papers relating to the diamonds, the hotel-bills, and so on; but Winifred's letters he put on one side, unopened.

"I presume you admit the authenticity of these documents?" said Fawcett senior.

Mr. Marrables, as if unwilling to commit himself to an opinion, replied by a little deprecatory gesture of the hand; but Lancelot answered at once.

"I believe them to be perfectly genuine," he said. "I can answer for my own letters, and for my wife's handwriting on the envelopes of these others."

"You will permit me to look at the letter which professes to be from ourselves?" said Mr. Marrables. "Humph!—written on our office-paper, I see; it looks very like the real thing."

"It *is* the real thing, Mr. Marrables," said John Fawcett.

"And the packet of miscellaneous correspondence?—no, thank you. I don't desire to examine it. I am only wondering if it contains a letter from Sir Reginald Barker to Lord Brackenbury, in reference to the sale of a carriage-horse? An idle question, perhaps!"

"I—I believe there is some such letter," said Fawcett, unable to conceal his astonishment.

Even Lancelot wondered how Mr. Marrables should know what was in the packet.

"And those miniatures of his mother and brother,

which the late Lord Brackenbury always took with him when he travelled—you can, of course, produce those also?"

The Fawcetts looked at each other—hesitated—admitted that they had nothing of the kind.

"You are quite sure, Frank, that his lordship did not mention the miniatures?" suggested the uncle.

Then Francis Fawcett seemed to search his memory. He could not be sure—he would not venture to say positively; yet he fancied that something of the kind had been named.

"And now," said Mr. Marrables, with the air of a man who was coming to the point—"and now, gentlemen, supposing your 'documentary evidence' to be bonâ fide, there arises another and a very serious question. Namely, how did your client obtain possession of these papers?"

"He did not 'obtain,' he *retained* possession of them, Mr. Marrables," said the elder Fawcett, severely.

Mr. Marrables smiled.

"Let us treat this matter seriously," said he. "You cannot, as men of business, suppose that my client, or any other sane person, would accept the mere authenticity of any number of documents as evidence of personal identity? Your client, gentlemen, is neither a bill nor a letter. He is not receipted; he has not been through the post."

"We wish to treat this matter seriously, Mr. Marrables. It is not we who treat it with levity," replied the younger Fawcett. "We are quite aware that more conclusive testimony is necessary; and here it is."

With this, he brought out some sheets of folded foolscap, and opened them upon the table.

"The signed declaration of Abraham Stanway, of Burfield Moor. Abraham Stanway testifies to recognising his lordship, and to being reminded by his lordship of various circumstances which he had himself forgotten till they were brought back to his memory. I need not go into the details—you can read them for yourself. The signed declaration of Isaac Plant, who has also recognised his former landlord. The signed declaration of Seth Plant, son of the above, to the same effect. The signed declaration of Zachary and Keziah Myott; also to the same effect. All these witnesses are prepared to substantiate their testimony upon oath."

"Is it possible?" said Mr. Marrables. "Really, this is interesting. Your own tenants, my dear Lord Brackenbury—your own respected and respectable tenants!"

"Do you object to the witnesses, Mr. Marrables?"

"Oh, dear, no! Quite the contrary—I am charmed. And does this complete your case?"

"Not quite. We have yet to submit to your client's consideration his lordship's account of his life and travels during the past seventeen years, taken down from his lordship's own *viva voce* statement; together with various letters and papers relating to the period of his residence in San Francisco and elsewhere. We shall be happy to leave you copies of these, for your client's perusal at leisure."

"Don't you think, now (to be candid), Mr. Fawcett, that it would save us all a great deal of trouble, if your client would consent to an interview, and tell his story for himself?"

"No, sir—I do not," replied the elder man, half

angrily. "We have already explained that his lordship objects to meet his brother under the present and altered painful circumstances. There is no need, sir, to go over that ground again."

"But we deny that the circumstances are painful, Mr. Fawcett. It may be disagreeable to your client to want money; but we beg to assure you that, were he the person you represent him to be, nothing would give us more pleasure than to satisfy his demands."

"He should have four times twenty-five thousand pounds," said Lancelot, speaking for the second time.

"You hear that, gentlemen? A hundred thousand pounds is a large sum. Your client has but to present himself in person (and to convince us of his identity), and a hundred thousand pounds are at his disposal."

There was a momentary silence. Then Francis Fawcett spoke.

"I will freely confess, Mr. Marrables, that I am somewhat of your opinion. I wish our client *could* be prevailed upon to meet his brother; but when a man has been supplanted in his dearest affections . . . ."

Lancelot half rose from his chair; but Mr. Marrables checked him with a gesture.

"I am delighted," he said, "that Mr. Francis Fawcett takes so business-like a view of the matter. And, such being the case, I cannot doubt that these gentlemen will be pleased to learn that their client has consented to give us the pleasure of his company."

Whereupon Mr. Marrables rapped the table with a ruler, and there entered Mr. Blake, followed, very slowly and reluctantly, by a sandy-haired, showily-dressed man of perhaps forty-five or forty-seven years of age.

"My dear Lord Brackenbury," said Mr. Marrables, "I have the pleasure of presenting to you Messrs. Fawcett and Clarke's mysterious client. This is Mr. Compton, alias Cuthbert Lord Brackenbury, alias Samuel Prouting, who was your brother's valet."

* * * * * *

"You are sure you have all you want, Prouting?"

"Quite sure, my lord."

"There is nothing I can do for you in any way?"

"You—you have done too much already, my lord. More than I deserve."

There is humility in the words; but the man's manner is even more humble. He stands shuffling his feet and nervously clasping and unclasping his hands; the picture of self-abasement.

Lord Brackenbury looks at him almost with compassion.

"Well, you have acted the part of a great scoundrel, Prouting," he says; "but it is open to you to do better in the future."

"I wish to do better, my lord."

"It rests with yourself. You have the world once more before you. And it is not as if you were going back to California or the States. In Canada, you will find yourself among new scenes and new people. You can make a fresh start, if you choose."

"Indeed, my lord, I will."

They are standing on the deck of an Allan-Line steamer bound for Quebec. It is almost dark; and the smoke, and noise, and confusion of Liverpool and the Mersey are around them.

"Well, if you want help or advice, you are to write to Mr. Blake; but to attempt to deceive us in any way

will be useless—and impossible. There goes the bell—so good-bye to you."

"Good-bye, my lord. I'm—I'm truly grateful for your goodness—and" . . . .

"And what? Make haste—they are going to remove the gangway."

"And please, my lord, if you approved, I'd write to Lettice by and by, when I was settled, and if she cared to come out and bring the boy" . . . . .

Lord Brackenbury hesitates—then shakes his head.

"No," he says, sternly. "The woman has suffered enough; and the lad has never seen you. Leave them in peace."

With this, he goes ashore; and the gangway is withdrawn; and presently the "Proserpine" is under way.

Four hours later, Lord Brackenbury is once more standing on the deck of a big steamer; and this time as a passenger. The vessel is a Cunarder bound for the Mediterranean and Adriatic seas; and he has taken his passage direct for Bari. He is going home—without having seen his brother's face.

Looking back at the fast-receding lights of the great city, he tells himself that this last is the hardest sacrifice of all.

"Good-bye, Lancelot!"

The night is dark, and there are none to see his tears.

THE END.

Erratum: Page 230, line 19: for Ilissus read Cephissus.

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